

DEPARTMENT OF TEACHER EDUCATION

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## CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Only study guide for

**PRS2026**

Study guide 2 for

**PCP409L**

Compiled by  
Dr Ellen Lenyai

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# Preface

I would like to welcome you most warmly to Children's Literature. I hope that you will find this module interesting and practical. You should view this study guide as a supplement to the prescribed book and as an effort to discuss the content of this module. This study guide also identifies the sections that provide the necessary background information to provide you with a sound foundation in this field of study.

The information in this study guide is divided into study units. At the beginning of each study unit the outcomes of that study unit will be stated. It is advisable to formulate questions to test your knowledge and skills in terms of these outcomes. Self-evaluation questions have been set at the end of each study unit to help you to master the content. Obviously these questions do not include every question that could possibly be set on the work!

Each study unit is an attempt to introduce a different theme from the prescribed book.

Reference is made to:

- literature for children
- classification of books by both format and genre
- creating a literature-rich environment and selectively suitable literature for young children
- presenting literature to young children

Further assistance is given in Tutorial Letter 101 which advises you on how to approach and plan your study of this module. This information will help you study and integrate the prescribed book and the information in this study guide.

This study guide is not based on any particular book, but refers to a number of books.

This study guide explains how practitioners or educators should approach the content of Children's Literature and how they should use the content of the *Revised National Curriculum Statement for Grades R–9 (Schools) Policy document 2002* written by the Department of Education. You are advised to obtain this policy document (Languages) and to be informed about Outcomes-Based Education (OBE).

I hope that you will find Children's Literature pleasant and meaningful, and that your studies will be successful. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any problems or questions arising from your studies.

Best wishes

(Ms) Ellen Lenyai



## *Children's literature*

After you have completed this module on Children's Literature, you should be able to teach children's literature with a view to using it as a medium for teaching and educating the young child as a total being. Your study should enable you to

- give an account of the theory concerned
- put into practice the presentation skills required
- assume an appropriate attitude towards your task

In order to attain these outcomes, you will need to be able to

- **give an account** of the outcomes that we pursue when presenting literature to the young child
- **discuss** the characteristics of literature appropriate to the various age groups in the early childhood development phase
- display the **appropriate attitude** to and **necessary skills** for presenting stories, verses and rhymes in an early childhood centre and the Foundation Phase in a primary school

The term "ECD centre" is used in this study guide. It refers to and includes all locations where children in the early childhood development phase are taught: preprimary schools, primary schools, community centres, homes and so on.

## *Study unit 1*

# *The languages learning area*

### *1.1 The languages learning area — home language (LLA)*

Please read the outcomes of this unit before you begin with the whole module. The information contained in this unit is intended to inform you about the curriculum of the Languages Learning Area as stipulated in the revised policy.

#### **Outcomes**

- |                               |  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| 1 Listening:                  | The learner will be able to listen for information and enjoyment, and respond appropriately in a whole variety of situations.                          |
| 2 Speaking:                   | The learner will be able to communicate confidently and effectively in spoken language in a wide range of situations.                                  |
| 3 Reading and viewing:        | The learner will be able to read and view for information and enjoyment, and respond critically to aesthetic, cultural and emotional values and texts. |
| 4 Writing:                    | The learner will be able to write different kinds of factual and imaginative texts for a wide range of purposes.                                       |
| 5 Thinking and reasoning:     | The learner will be able to use language to think, reason, as well as to access, process and use information for learning.                             |
| 6 Language structure and use: | The learner will know and be able to use the sounds, words and grammar of the language to create and interpret text.                                   |

Of the six outcomes, the first three are appropriate for the young child's learning although young (zero to five years old) learners are not expected to read in the formal sense. Outcomes four to six are more applicable for Grades 1 to 3. As this module on Children's Literature is intended to expose children to the written word and lays the foundation for later language learning, no assessment standards will be discussed. These will be included in other modules where formal reading and writing are taught.

## 1.2 Introduction

This study unit contains information from the policy document, Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R–9 (Schools) of May 2002. It is a document of the Department of National Education aimed at promoting commitment as well as competence among teachers. It is discussed here to provide a broad perspective on children’s literature which is an aspect of language. The stipulated language skills, values and concepts are outlined on a grade-by-grade basis as outcomes of LLA, while Learning Programmes specify the scope of learning and assessment for each phase. In this study guide reference will be made to the outcomes of the Foundation Phase only.

The Languages Learning Area includes all eleven official languages which include Afrikaans, English, Sesotho, Setswana, ISizulu, XiTsonga, Seswati, siXhosa, Sepedi, XiVenda, IsinDebele, the languages approved by the Pan South African Language Board (PANSALB) and the South African Certification Authority (SAFCERT) such as Braille and South African Sign Language. The Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R–9 (Schools) or the Curriculum Statement regards all educators, and therefore practitioners as key contributors to the transformation of education in South Africa. It is envisaged that all educators and practitioners will be qualified, competent and dedicated and will be able to fulfil the various roles outlined in the Norms and Standards for Educators. The learner will be literate with a national identity that is shaped by values such as democracy, equality, human dignity, life and social justice.

Since the information in this study unit pertains to South African schools, it will not be compulsory for examination purposes. International students could, however, learn something of value from it, especially with regard to the expected Languages Learning Area Outcomes.

## 1.3 The objectives of LLA

The Curriculum Statement states that, in a multilingual community like South Africa, it is important that learners reach high levels of proficiency in at least two languages, and that they are able to communicate in other languages. It follows an additive approach to multilingualism where all learners learn their home language and at least one additional official language. In instances where learners use their first additional language as the language of learning and teaching, educators should provide strong support. However, the recommendation is that the home language should be used for learning and teaching wherever possible.

The purpose of LLA is to promote the learning of languages. It is a fact that children make sense of the world around them through language. Language is a vehicle of thought and is at the core of our very existence. Languages serve a variety of purposes, including:

- *Personal.* The personal purpose is to sustain, develop and transform identities; to sustain relationships in family and community; and for personal growth and pleasure.
- *Communicative.* The communicative purpose is to communicate appropriately and effectively in a variety of social contexts.
- *Educational.* The educational purpose is to develop tools for thinking and reasoning, and to provide access to information.
- *Aesthetic.* The aesthetic purpose is to create, interpret and play imaginatively with oral, visual and written texts.

- *Cultural*. The cultural purpose is to understand and appreciate languages and cultures, and the heritage they carry.
- *Political*. The political purpose is to assert oneself and challenge others; to persuade others of a particular point of view; to position oneself and others; and to sustain, develop and transform identities.
- *Critical*. The critical purpose is to understand the relationships between language, power and identity; to challenge uses of these where necessary; to understand the dynamic nature of culture and to resist persuasion where necessary.

## *1.4 The importance of LLA for the young child's language development*

The Languages Learning Area promotes the young child's language skills in the following manner:

- It develops reading and writing, the foundation for other important literacies.
- It is the medium for much of the other learning in the curriculum, such as Mathematics and Social Sciences.
- It encourages intercultural understanding, access to other views, and a critical understanding of the concept of culture.
- It stimulates imaginative and creative activity, and thus promotes the goals of arts and culture.
- It provides a way of communicating information, and promotes many of the goals of science, technology and environmental education.
- It develops the critical tools necessary to become responsible citizens.

For the Grade R educator, it is important to know the following information quoted from the Revised National Curriculum Statement:

All learners come to school with prior knowledge about and a high level of proficiency in their home language. They have developed this through a variety of interactions with others in their home environment in the context of care, nurturing and play. Because home environments differ, the knowledge children bring with them to school also differs. However, whatever they know should be used in their language development. This is central to their personal growth, their interactions with others, and their access to learning and the world around them. In the next section, we briefly explain:

- learners' prior knowledge
- environments for learning
- principles and approaches guiding this curriculum

### 1.4.1 Focus

When learners enter Grade R or Grade 1, they have learned much through listening, and can speak with varying degrees of fluency and confidence. They have been raised with the culture, traditions and knowledge present in their home environment, and these are part of their language knowledge. The classroom should be a place that celebrates, respects, and builds on what learners know.

### 1.4.2 Language development: a gradual process

The principle guiding the teaching and learning of literacy in this curriculum is that language development involves a gradual process of improving. Mistakes are a natural part of that process, and with support learners' language will become increasingly more accurate as they have more opportunities to use and develop their language knowledge and skills.

### 1.4.3 A balanced approach to literacy development

In this curriculum, a "balanced approach" to literacy development has been used. It is balanced because it begins with children's emergent literacy, it involves them in reading real books and writing for genuine purposes, and it deals with phonics. These are the things learners need to know and do in order to learn to read and write successfully. In reading, this means moving away from the "reading readiness approach", which held that children were not ready to start learning to read and write until they were able to perform subskills such as auditory discrimination and visual discrimination and had developed their fine and large motor skills to a certain level.

With the balanced approach, these skills:

- do not have to be in place before a learner can start to read and write
- can and should be developed during children's early learning experiences

In this module on Children's Literature, it is very important not to forget that the aim is to develop the love and enjoyment of literature which is the foundation for formal reading and writing. The poems are intended to evoke interest in literature and to show the relation between spoken and written language.



**For more information on the schools policy, please refer to the Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9 (Schools) English: Home Language. 2002. Department of Education, Pretoria.**

## 1.5 *Self-evaluation questions*

- (1) Name the six LLA outcomes and elaborate on each.
- (2) Name the eleven official South African languages.
- (3) Why does the languages policy stipulate that learners in South Africa must be able to reach high levels of proficiency in at least two languages?
- (4) Explain why it is important for the Grade R educator to know the learners' language proficiency and home environment in order to further the children's language learning.

## *Study unit 2*

# *Children's literature in early childhood development*

### **Outcomes**

After completing this study unit, you should be able to:

- show how literature for young children (stories, poems and rhymes) can advance the young child's total development
- show an understanding of children's literature by discussing the nature of children's literature in detail
- show the strengths and weaknesses of different forms of literature

## *2.1 Introduction*

Developing a language is fundamentally important for the normal, complete development of a human being. This also explains why opportunities to use and hear language are so important in an early childhood centre. Language is part of every presentation and period in the daily programme. But in addition, there are specific periods set aside for focusing on the development of language. They are:

- informal discussions
- story time

Language development can, however, be enhanced in every presentation, because both teacher and child use language in every activity.

There are two basic strategies we can use to encourage language acquisition in the young child:

- Provide a rich, varied language environment, so that the child hears language.
- Provide regular opportunities for the child to use language.

The use of literature during story time or at any other suitable opportunity, is one of the most important teaching media. The teacher has to help children to **hear** language and to encourage them to **use** language.

## *2.2 The purpose of presenting literature to young children*

The purpose of early childhood teaching is to develop the young child as a total person. Since literature provides the teacher with such a valuable medium for educating the child, the purpose of presenting stories, verses and rhymes to young children is to involve them as total persons.

Story time and other opportunities for young children to become acquainted with children's literature are important moments in the daily programme. Stories, verses and rhymes should mean far more to young children than simply a way of "killing time". Stories, verses and rhymes are presented with the development of the whole child in mind. We shall discuss the purpose of exposing the child to stories, verses and rhymes under separate headings.

### Language development which encompasses

- expanding vocabulary
- improving oral language
- using creative language
- creating the desire to read
- cultivating listening skills

### Intellectual development

- concept formation
- thinking processes
- logical reasoning
- critical thinking
- problem solving

### Personality development which encompasses

- responsible decision making
- task completion
- positive self-image
- understanding emotions
- controlling emotions

### Social and moral development which encompasses

- empathy
- socialisation
- values and norms

### Aesthetic and creative development which encompasses

- enriching the imagination
- providing information to promote creativity

### 2.2.1 Language development

Language can be developed by introducing young children to stories which are written in good, correct language. This exposure will enable young children to improve their use of

language. Through stories they may be exposed to, say, English (non-English speakers) thus laying the foundation for learning a second/third language in a very enjoyable way.

- *Expanding vocabulary.* Exposure to new words used in context in a children's story can help to expand a young child's vocabulary. If children hear a new word in isolation (used out of context) they will find the word meaningless and their vocabulary will not be expanded. Stories thus play an important role in vocabulary expansion and, with this in mind, teachers can make use of the following:
  - stories that contain a few new words
  - stories where the emphasis is on the meanings of words
  - dramatisation of a story: involving the children in acting out the meaning of new words
  - presenting different books dealing with the same topic

Avoid using stories that contain a lot of unfamiliar words and ideas because young children will not be able to listen to them with understanding or enjoyment.

- *Improving oral language.* Teachers play a significant role in the development of young children's oral language skills, because they provide them with a language model. A young child hears and imitates the teacher's pronunciation, sentence construction, vocabulary and general language usage. Teachers can improve young children's oral language skills by providing opportunities through stories such as:
  - discussions about the content of a story
  - discussions about the illustrations in a book
  - dramatisation of a story
  - retelling of a story using puppets and masks
  - retelling a story to a friend
- *Using creative language.* Young children get a great deal of pleasure from words, especially from nonsense words and rhyming words, so stories that emphasise the sound of words are always popular. This inventiveness also improves a child's own creative language. Accordingly, you should provide stories
  - which feature words that represent sounds (onomatopoeia); that are written in rhyme; that have interesting language patterns; which play with the meanings of words. (This type of story is often humorous. Just make sure that the word usage matches the child's ability to comprehend.)
- *Creating a desire to read.* Stories and children's story books make children under six years aware of the connection between written symbols and the spoken word. Story books are an important introduction to preparing children to read. In addition, children learn that reading is important and pleasant, and this is an important factor in preparing them to read. Reading is important because children's interest in stories and in reading develops out of happy experiences of listening to stories.
- *Listening skills.* It is important for the teacher to help and guide the young child to listen with attention. Listening is of paramount importance in any learning event but, because young children are surrounded by noises and sounds, they are not always sure **how** they should listen, or to **what**. It is the teacher's task, and a difficult one, to help the child to listen to what is important, and to listen with understanding. A teacher can foster a young child's listening skills by telling or reading stories. Stories may be used to teach a young child how to listen **critically** and to do so with **attention** and **appreciation**. Because young children usually listen with great attention, or are guided to do so by their teacher,



their ability to concentrate, listen and pay attention improves, and this has a positive effect on their language development.

Because young children learn language by hearing it, the correct, creative language that is used in stories will have a positive influence on their language development. Teachers should, however, make a point of selecting stories that will improve various aspects of children's language.

### 2.2.2 Intellectual development

Children's intellectual development may be enhanced by:

- aiding their discovery and refinement of new concepts
- cultivating their proficiency in a range of thinking processes
- furthering their ability to reason logically
- fostering their critical thinking
- introducing them to problem solving
- *Concept formation.* (Although young children need concrete experiences to form concepts, stories can provide an additional source of information.) Stories may be used to improve their ability to form concepts by:
  - supplying additional information
  - awakening an interest in a particular theme
  - clearing up misconceptions
- *Thinking processes.* Thinking processes like observation, comparison, classification and application of knowledge can be improved by means of stories. Books that have been written with the specific purpose of expanding these skills, are available.
- *Logical reasoning.* Very young children are still at a concrete level of reasoning, and they draw conclusions about a matter or an event based on just a few — or even only one — of its aspects. The way they reason is often still quite illogical. Stories can lead children to see the connection (or causality) between events.
- *Critical thinking.* Teachers can encourage children to think critically by asking them open questions, as opposed to closed questions, about the events in a story. (Open questions are questions which do not have only one correct answer. Depending on the person's point of view and insight, they can have a variety of possibilities. Closed questions have only one correct answer.)  
Open questions may be asked while one is telling a story but, be careful, this could turn story time into some kind of comprehension test. The teacher's questions should arise spontaneously from the questions the children ask.
- *Problem solving.* Stories provide considerable scope for guiding young children with problem solving. It is important for them to realise that there are various solutions to everyday problems.

### 2.2.3 Personality development

Children can be guided towards the following:

- *Responsible decision making.* Teachers can use stories to help young children to learn to make decisions by, say, getting them to choose a story. But only children who are in a position to make choices should be offered the opportunity to do so.  
Questions like "Would you like to hear a story?" should therefore be avoided, because

the teacher has usually already decided that the children are going to listen to a story, and asking the question is just a habit. If the children are allowed to choose a story, then they should be given that choice. It is, of course, the teacher's responsibility to make sure that the stories from which the children can choose are all equally suitable and, therefore, acceptable.

- *Task completion.* Although, only at the Foundation Phase level, is task completion appropriate as a formal goal for story time, the younger child can be led to an understanding of it. If one guides children to listen to a whole story, or to retell a story in its entirety, they are being spontaneously guided into task completion.
- *Building up a self-image.* Glazer (1986:158) emphasises the value of stories in developing young children's positive self-image. An important aspect of the self-image is grasping one's own abilities, and stories can help young children to accept their shortcomings and to recognise their own potential.
- *Understanding and controlling one's emotions.* Glazer (1986:171–73) describes four ways in which stories can contribute to the young child's emotional development:
  - They demonstrate that one's own emotions are not unique, but that similar emotions are experienced by others.
  - They examine emotions from different points of view.
  - They suggest various ways of dealing with emotions.
  - They show that one person can experience conflicting emotions.

When the content is well chosen, stories can contribute to the establishment of a positive self-image and a feeling of self-worth in a young child. The agreeable sense of togetherness that prevails during story time in itself offers an opportunity for affective (emotional) bonding between the young child and teacher which, in turn, is an opportunity to strengthen the child's self-image.

## 2.2.4 Social and moral development

Teachers can promote young children's moral development by guiding them towards the following:

- *Empathy.* Because young children identify with the characters in a story, they make the problems and successes of the characters their own. As a result, they learn to have empathy with the fortunes of other people.
- *Socialisation.* Story time is a group activity led by an adult. As time goes by, the young child has to learn to meet the group's expectations, like not preventing other children from listening to the story. A child who is new to the group, or a reserved child, finds it easier to join in at story time than with other activities, because he can sit quietly and listen with everyone else, and no-one will make any concrete demands on him.
- *Values and attitudes.* Stories can, without moralising, initiate young children into the norms and values of society. In addition, these children gradually learn that different people may have different attitudes and values and that these should also be respected.

## 2.2.5 Aesthetic and creative development

Stories can provide a starting point for introducing creative activities such as art, because they enrich the young child's imagination. They can also give direction to music activities, which may become more enjoyable and imaginative as a result of the association.

## 2.5 Poetry for young children

### 2.5.1 Introduction

Poetry can be used to further the child's total development. Developmental aspects such as cognition, language, emotions, morals and the child's motor development can all be enhanced through poetry activities. Refer to Grobler, HM, Faber, RJ, Orr, JP, Calitz, EM & Van Staden, CJS. 1998. *The day care handbook*. Pretoria: Kagiso for details about these developmental aspects.

According to Glazer (1997:261) poetry is not one-dimensional like the ordinary language that is used to communicate. It has four dimensions: the *intellectual*, the *conscious*, the *emotional* and the *imaginative*.

### 2.5.2 Elements of good poetry for young children

Poetry is described in terms of its elements and forms. The poet uses imagery, figurative language, rhythm, sound and patterns to craft poems. The ways poems are constructed, look and sound determine their form. These include narrative poems, lyrics, limericks, and nonsense verse. Children are not expected to use these terms but teachers should know which forms are most appealing to which groups of children (Rainnes & Isbell 1994:230–243).

- *Descriptive poetry*. Young children are particularly drawn to poems that are descriptive. Since they are explorers of their ever-widening physical and social world, the descriptive poem appeals to their senses. They like descriptions that help them imagine sights, sounds, and physical movements. They enjoy the comparisons the poet makes when creating an image. The poet uses imagery and the figurative language of *simile* and *metaphor* to create pictures in the mind. The poem "Cat's Tongue" is a good example.

Cat's tongue.  
Cat's tongue,  
Pink as clover

Cat's tongue  
Cat's tongue  
Wash all over (Rainnes 1994:32)

- *Rhyme and sound*. Another reason why poetry appeals more than ordinary language is because of sound repetition. The poem "Cheers" is a good example:

The frogs and the serpents each had a football team,  
And I heard their cheer leaders in my dreams  
"Bilgewater, bilgewater" called the frog,  
Bilgewater, bilgewater,  
Sis, boom, bog!  
Roll'em off the log,  
Slog'em in the sog. (Glazer 1997:262)

- *Rhythm*. In other poems, rhythms can suggest the light steps of dancing, the slow rhythm of a funeral march, or the stop-and-start movements of a baseball player caught between bases. In the poem "Cheers", the rhythmic foot-stamping represents a crowd of football fans.
- *Denotation and connotation*. Poets often select words for their connotation as well as

their denotation. A single word can elicit both emotional and intellectual responses from a child.

- *Imagery*. Descriptions of sensory experiences are called imagery. Poets use language to help us imagine how things looked, felt, tasted, sounded or smelt.
- *Figurative language*. Figurative language includes the use of *metaphor*, *simile*, and *personification*. It is language that is not to be taken literally.

### 2.5.3 Forms of poetry

The way the text is arranged on the printed page, the way syllables are repeated, the rhyming pattern and *free verse* (poetry without the constraints of rhyme) are examples of how poetry looks, is read, and sounds. Forms of poetry include:

- *Narrative poetry*. Narrative poetry tells a story in rhyme. Many such poems are available in picture format. This increases their popularity with young children.
- *Ballads*. A ballad is a long narrative poem that usually relates a single incident in a protracted manner. It is not a suitable form for young children.
- *Lyrics*. Lyric poetry describes something — an object, scene or feeling in line with a singing quality. You can imagine lyric poems set to music. They are popular with young children.
- *Nonsense verse*. Nonsense verse is humorous or musical verse that plays with the absurd in ideas or language. This form of poetry is very popular with young children because of the humorous nonsensical lines. The following is a good example:

As I was standing in the street  
As quiet as could be,  
A great big ugly man came up  
and tied his horse to me (Glazer 1997:271).

- *Limerick*. A limerick is a funny, nonsense poem: five lines of carefully organised silliness. In classical forms the first, second and fifth lines have a limerick rhyme, while the third and fourth lines have a rhyme and rhythm of their own. A typical piece of nonsense limerick looks and sounds like this:

There was an old man with a beard,  
Who said: "It's just as I feared! —  
Two owls and a hen,  
Four larks and a wren,  
Have all built their nests in my beard." (Glazer 1997:272).

- *Free verse*. Free verse has no formal governing rules, no required rhythm, no rhyme, no prescribed length of line. This form is not new and has existed from ancient times, as is the case with folk stories.

## 2.6 Self-evaluation questions

### Long questions on Study unit 2

- (1) Explain in detail how children's literature can enhance the total development of young children.
- (2) Write an informative essay about the nature of children's poetry.

- (3) Which of the children's books and stories would you consider best for preschoolers and why? Provide information on the nature of books and stories you have selected.

**Short questions on Study unit 2**

- (1) Name the five areas of child development that can be fostered through the use of books.
- (2) Write brief notes on how literature can encourage the child's intellectual development.
- (3) What do you understand by the following?
  - (a) rhyme and rhythm
  - (b) descriptive poetry
  - (c) imagery
  - (d) figurative language
- (4) Name the different forms of poetry and discuss any one.
- (5) For which age group are picture books best suited? Explain why.
- (6) How does traditional literature differ from fantasy literature.
- (7) Elaborate on traditional literature.

**Questions on literature genres**

- (1) List the different literature genres.
- (2) What is the purpose of exposing children to all the genres?
- (3) Which genres do you think are most appropriate for toddlers and why?
- (4) How would you involve young learners in your literature lessons?
- (5) What is the main objective of telling or reading stories to young learners?

## *Study unit 3*

# *Different genres in children's literature*

### *3.1 Defining children's literature*

It is not easy to separate children's literature from adult literature because, in both instances, the concept of literature refers to imaginative writing that results in an aesthetic experience for the reader. Broadly speaking, literature may be defined as oral or written discourse that is neither functional nor referential in its intention. In other words, literature does not relate directly to reality and distances itself from everyday concerns.

Literature for children differs from adult literature in degree rather than kind. The same themes or topics may be addressed and the same elements manipulated, but it is children's experiences and understanding that determine whether a book is *for them*. Any piece of literature can be examined in terms of its *implied audience*, that is, the readers for whom the book is intended. One difference between children's literature and adult literature is that children's literature tends to be shorter than adult novels, and the plots are simpler. The main characters themselves are often children, and emphasis is placed on the characters' actions rather than on their thoughts. Ultimately, a book becomes a children's book when children read, enjoy, and understand that book.

### *3.2 The importance of children's literature*

#### 3.2.1 Emergent literacy

Research into children's literature has revealed that young children who are read to and who show interest in stories are more successful school beginners than those who were not exposed to children's literature. Preschool teachers have also noted that the same learners who enjoyed books at preschool level are often the ones who do well in later years. Teachers are thus able to capitalise on the effective strategies children used long before they entered school. Teachers can keep alive the intense excitement young children feel about learning to read and write by providing learning activities designed around learners' interests. Teachers can personalise instruction because language, as a literacy process, is not based on a preset package of instructional materials. Literacy development is based on how the preschool teacher encourages preschoolers to learn to read and write naturally, by exposing them to children's literature.

#### 3.2.2 Opening up the learner's world

A significant part of an educator's role is to help each learner enjoy learning and open up that

learner's world to an ever-widening set of experiences. Teachers know that books and stories help learners go beyond the physical world of their immediate environment and find ways of connecting children's firsthand experiences with good books. Five-year-olds enjoy relating stories to peers and reading the pictures and (sometimes) recognising words. The learners are already familiar with the concept of reading and writing and look forward to learning new things from literature.

### 3.2.3 Promoting interest in books

It is through children's literature that young learners develop an interest in books and this serves as a foundation for their future success as learners. As children relate to stories in books, they understand how they are like others and begin building bridges between themselves and the rest of the world. They grasp new knowledge by being confronted with information and stories that challenge their present levels of understanding.

### 3.2.4 Promoting aesthetic development

Aesthetic reading is the preschooler's version of reading. In fact, preschoolers are very honest in their appraisal of books. Their interest in the stories they read speaks for itself. The story must interest them either by connecting with their own lives, or the ideas expressed in the story must be captivating to the point that they are led through the story (expressed in words and illustrations).

### 3.2.5 Developing a reading culture

In today's literate culture, the demand for more advanced reading and writing skills will obviously escalate. Young learners who are growing and emerging in their literacy will find support in a family and a society that value reading and writing. Given the many benefits of quality children's literature in the lives of young learners, many preschool teachers adapt and change their strategies in presenting children's literature. For example, they:

- revamp their presentation style
- observe children's choices of activities
- determine why some books capture the learners' interest
- devise an approach based on individual and group characteristics

## 3.3 *Picture books*

Picture books, which are stories told in words and pictures, have often been called the "twice-told" tale. However, for the young child, there is no separation of the text and pictures. Instead, the picture storybook is an imaginative interaction of text and illustrations. The combination of text and illustrations used to create a story are as intermingled as the lyrics and melody used to create a song. The picture storybook is an enticement to begin reading, a way for the young child to visualise a story, to approach a book, to revisit a story; it is a primary source of engagement.

Librarians and teachers tend to call books that create stories with few words and many pictures *picture books*, while parents and children often call them storybooks. When asked to recall their beginning literacy experiences, many adults describe their favourite picture book. In fact, they also remember that, when their reading instruction turned to chapter books, they missed the pictures a great deal. The picture book is the form most associated with the early



childhood years. It is the only type of book named for its format rather than content. Picture books can be of many varieties: folklore, fantasy, poetry, or realistic fiction.

The following are the criteria teachers and student teachers can use to make good selections, examine ways of classifying picture books, and think about the association between the content and the format of the book. Teachers and student teachers must broaden their appreciation of the story and the artistry in picture books if they are to introduce these books to young learners.

### 3.4 *Criteria for choosing picture books*

#### 3.4.1 Appropriateness and appeal

Of course, the first criterion for selecting picture books for young children is the appropriateness of the book for the children's age and interest. Each of the titles previously mentioned has become a part of the culture of the early childhood classroom because it appeals to young children. Whether engaging children in answering questions, as in *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?*, appealing to the young child's sense of rhythm and rhyme, as in the story of Sam-I-Am in *Green Eggs and Ham*, or identifying with all young children's attempts to stay awake, as in *Goodnight Moon*, the successful picture book connects with the young child through its interactive organisation, or its play with language, or its content (which is aligned with the child's development). While the question, "Is the story appropriate for the young child?" is rather simple, the answers are many and complex and should be followed up with the related question, What makes the story appealing to young children? Bear in mind the following two questions:

- Is the picture book appropriate for the young child?
- What makes the book appealing to young children?

#### 3.4.2 Match of text and illustrations

When asked why they like a particular picture book, teachers and children often say, "The pictures are just beautiful", or "I like the story". When teachers and students vacillate and can't decide whether they prefer the illustrations or the text, then a good match of text and pictures has been achieved. The best of the picture books, such as those previously mentioned, contain illustrations and text that complement each other and that are dependent upon each other to the point that one would be ineffective without the other.

*Owl Moon* is the story of a father and his daughter going "owling" on a moonlit winter night. The author and illustrator captured the pleasure the child feels just being with her father in a quiet, peaceful, and natural world. The emotionally warm, yet suspenseful story, is told from the child's point of view. The magnificent winter scenes in watercolour and ink draw the reader back again and again to enjoy the mood. The elusive owl's appearance at the end of the book is magnificently illustrated (Raines & Canady 1991:128).

The first step in selecting a good picture book is to read it. We suggest enjoying the story and the illustrations as a whole first, then going back to the book to examine the illustrations and see if there is a good match between the text and pictures.

The match between text and illustrations involves many more subtleties than simple colour correspondence. The illustrations should also convey the mood, match the setting, and invite



the child into the text visually, helping the child to understand the plot and adding to the theme of the story.

### 3.4.3 Appropriateness of illustration to story type

As we have already said, the criteria for evaluating the content of a good children's book depends upon the genre; the same is true for illustrations. The pictures should enhance the tale because they are appropriate for the type of story. Similarly, in other stories, the mood of fancy is created with delicate lines and muted colours. By its very nature, realistic fiction requires realistic visual representations of life. The impact of some stories would be less without, for example, realistic drawings of family and play life.

Similarly, humour, from slapstick to subtle renditions, is dependent upon the text and illustration. Don and Audrey Wood's *The Little Mouse, the Red Ripe Strawberry, and the Big Hungry Bear* works well as a story because of the bold, comedic, and expressive visual humour. Imagine a tiny mouse wanting the same strawberry that a big hungry bear wants; at least, that's what the narrator leads Little Mouse to believe. The type of story is determined by the way the story is told and the type of illustration is determined by the type of story. Again, the form-and-function mixture of illustration and text becomes inseparable. When selecting picture books, ask yourself, "Are the illustrations appropriate for the type of story?"

### 3.4.4 Illustrating action

The way the action in a story is conveyed partly determines the type of story it is; whether it's the magical "poof" of a fairy godmother's wand producing Cinderella's elegant carriage or the giant drinking an entire lake dry, the action of the story is made visible in the illustration and moves the story along. The illustrators of children's books are responsible for making those printed action-words come to life for the young child, even before he or she can read. Good stories for young children depend upon lively action. Remember to note if the illustrations focus on the action.

### 3.4.5 Illustrations to create mood

Right from the beginning, the mood of a story is set by the illustrator's use of colour, light, and line. Don and Aubrey Woods' *The Napping House* is an excellent example of the use of colour to create mood. Because of the use of greyish blue with white accents in the illustrations, the reader knows immediately that the grandmother in the story is taking an afternoon nap, not tucked away in her feather bed for the night. The time and place are easily conveyed by the colour and light; the unusual colour accents, varied perspectives, and comical expressions make the reader turn the pages to see what comes next.

There are illustrations that create the mood of the story by enhancing what the author has written, and then there are books whose primary purpose is to create a mood. The sound effects build from the beginning "whisper of the rain" to the steady "singing of the rain" on to the driving force of the "roaring pouring" rain. As the poem proceeds, the rainstorm recedes and the listener is left at the end with the "wet, silent, after-time of rain". The beautifully simple and elegant illustrations, and even the dark blue endpaper pages of the book, are a perfect setting for the drama of the rainstorm (Raines & Canady 1991:98). Intrigue, suspense, down-to-earth reassurance, magical dreams, or the mysteries of nature can be communicated in the picture book by the illustrator's artistry with colour, light, and line used to convey or create the mood. Note if the illustrations of your selection create or enhance the mood of the story.

### 3.4.6 Illustrations to understand setting

It is not easy for young children to understand another time and place. They interpret the world from their knowledge of the immediate present. Their understanding of place is limited to the places they have experienced. To enter a story from another era or place that he or she has not experienced, the young child depends on illustrations.

Cynthia Rylant's *When I Was Young in the Mountains* cannot be understood by young children without Diane Goode's illustrations. This Caldecott Honor Book is a collection of scenes from a little girl's childhood in the mountains where she lived with her grandfather and grandmother. Rylant evokes a special warmth as she recalls how Grandfather looked when he came home from working in the mines, Grandmother's wonderful cooking, the swimming hole, and the Crawfords' general store. The reader can see mountain life, pumping water from a well, going to church and baptisms, posing for a travelling photographer, shelling beans on the front porch, and listening to the sounds of the birds. Diane Goode's delicate misty colours help children to imagine the story occurring in another time and place (Raines & Canady 1992:166).

Another time is conveyed by more than simply dressing the characters in a different style of clothing, just as place is conveyed by more than city or country scenes. Consider, for example, Barbara Cooney's *Miss Rumphius* and the way she transports the reader back through the places and times of the life of Alice and how she became known as the Lupine Lady.

*As a child she made three promises to her grandfather, to live by the sea, to travel to faraway places, and to make the world more beautiful. When she grew up, she became Miss Rumphius, the librarian. In her old age, she made the world more beautiful by sowing blue, purple, and rose-coloured lupines* (Raines & Canady 1992:162).

Barbara Cooney's distinctive style of fragile lines yet strong message is painted in acrylics with pencil. She captures the stages and places of Alice's life childhood, adult Miss Rumphius, and the ageing Lupine Lady with an exquisite, delicate touch. When reviewing illustrations, remember to ask yourself, "Do the illustrations help the young child understand time and place?"

### 3.4.7 Avoid stereotypes

Picture books for young children should avoid all stereotypes, including race, gender, and age stereotypes. There is a great deal of controversy about stereotyping. Books published today should obviously avoid stereotypes; however, some of the folktales that have been passed down for generations have fallen into disapproval, even censorship, because of some of the images portrayed. For example, *The Five Chinese Brothers* was thought to perpetuate the myth that all Chinese look alike. However, according to Kay Vandergrift,

*It is true that if there is only a single book, or a very few available about a culture or group of people, that work may exert undue influence on children's perception of those people. Nonetheless, the remedy is not to remove a book such as The Five Chinese Brothers but to increase the availability of other types of stories dealing with the Chinese people* (Vandergrift 1980:75–76).

The tales from the past are particularly poignant examples of stereotyping. Some African-American families object to stories which use black dialect. However, Patricia C. McKissack's *Flossie and the Fox* has won critical acclaim and become a favourite among many modern families:

*Set in another era, this folk tale-like story is about a little girl who outsmarts a sly fox by refusing to believe he is the fox. Told using some black dialect, Flossie's cunning, quick thinking retorts have children cheering for the heroine. In the author's note, Patricia McKissack attributes this tale to her grandfather (Raines & Canady 1992:164).*

The fact that the dialect represents the grandfather's voice makes it acceptable to most families, because many people remember dialect speakers from their childhood. As educators gain a more linguistic appreciation of dialects, we become less concerned about the form of language and more concerned about the quality of the story and the lasting impression the characters make on us.

Similarly, as we become more aware, sociologically, of the influence of stereotypes on children's understanding of sex roles and gender issues, the illustrations and stories in children's picture books have come under more scrutiny. Having Daddy cook spaghetti and Mother coming home from the office is appropriate sex-role identity; however, to have all fathers cooking and all mothers returning home from the office would do the young reader a disservice. What the early childhood teacher looks for is a balance of books that portray boys and girls and men and women engaged in the wide variety of activities that are a part of living, rather than limiting the characters to the types of tasks once associated with one gender only.

Achieving this balance requires diligent efforts on the part of the teacher. Finding female characters as the leads in picture book is imperative. Books still tend to have male rather than female leads. Many of the picture books have animal leads, but even then, maleness is inferred by the name of the character, dress, or actions.

Older citizens also express concern about the way grandparents and other older and elderly people are portrayed in children's picture books. The stereotypical plump little grandmother with white hair, glasses, and a long apron somehow does not capture the energetic grandmother of today. Grandparents approve of Betty Jo Stanovich's *Big Boy, Little Boy*, which is an inviting story of an afternoon shared by a little boy and his grandmother. Virginia Wright-Frierson illustrates the grandmother dressed in slacks and a sweater, with her grey hair cut in an easy style, not the stereotypical old woman with a long dress, bun on her head, and wire-rimmed glasses (Raines & Canady 1989:60). It is important to determine whether picture books avoid stereotyping. See chapter 6 for an in-depth discussion on how to avoid stereotypes.

### 3.4.8 Purpose for the classroom

There are many reasons teachers choose books for their classrooms — to read aloud, to place in the library, because it will help children to make associations with a concept, to extend or elaborate upon on a theme, or for the children's independent reading. The selection of a picture book for the classroom therefore very much depends on the purpose for which the book is intended. Some books are meant purely to entertain, others to inform, some to inspire. Many are stories for stories' own sake, because they connect us culturally, address our human frailties and strengths, or help us see beyond ourselves.

Making the right selection of picture books for the classroom depends on the way the teacher anticipates using these books. For example, selections for group time are needed to connect to the social studies or science thematic unit, which organises the early childhood curriculum. Picture books that match the theme, support the main ideas or build associated concepts, are obviously appropriate choices. Whether it's called group time, circle time, or story time, the label the teacher gives to the time he or she reads aloud places certain demands on the illustrations. Obviously, when reading to a large group of young children,

the pictures need to be large and clear enough for them to be seen at a distance. Some smaller books can still be read aloud to young children when the illustrations are bold and have a great deal of contrast.

The reason for selecting a particular book is sometimes related to the reading process itself. If predictable books are needed as confidence builders for beginning readers, there are many helpful lists available from reading specialists and librarians. If a picture book is needed because of a child's keen interest in a topic or some new influence in the family, such as a new baby's arrival, then just the right picture book should be found to fit the occasion.

### 3.4.9 Questions to guide choice of picture books

Is the picture book appropriate for the young child?

What makes the book appealing to young children?

Is there a good match between text and illustration?

Do the illustrations focus on the action?

Are the illustrations appropriate for the type of story?

Do the illustrations create or enhance the mood of the story?

Do the illustrations help the young child understand time and place?

Do the picture books avoid stereotyping, such as race, gender, or age stereotyping?

Will the picture book fit the purpose for which it will be used in the classroom?

## 3.5 *Types of picture books*

Picture books may be classified in many ways: by content, type of illustrations, story form, or organising format. In addition to the storybook, alphabet books, counting books, and wordless books are a part of this broad category of books, all of which we classify as picture books.

### 3.5.1 Alphabet books

Traditionally, some of the first books parents purchase for their children are the simple alphabet books. ABC books have a long literary history, dating back to the 1500s when the "horn books" contained the ABCs and a few illustrations. The horn book was a paddle-shaped wooden board to which papers were tacked and a sheet of thin transparent cow's horn was placed on top to protect the papers. Later, chapbooks — folded pieces of cardboard — had the alphabet and funny illustrations printed on them. During colonial times, the Puritans used the alphabet to organise religious teachings. Today, the ABC book is still popular for young children.

There are basically five types of alphabet books:

- (1) Letter and one-object picture associations
- (2) Letter and multiple object associations
- (3) Simple stories or narratives

- (4) Question or riddle ABCs
- (5) Theme alphabets

The complexity of the ABC book is usually the factor that determines the age for which the book is best suited. Infant and toddler ABC books tend to be simple, with only one picture associated with the letter. In this ABC board book for young children, the book begins with someone taking bites from various foods. The book begins, "A this someone ate apples, tart and red", and on the next page, "Then took a big bite of banana bread". The ABC board book is appealing because of the rhyme, the mystery, and fact that the foods are ones which toddlers are beginning to recognise.

The purpose of these simple ABC books is not to teach the alphabet, but to help children to begin recognising pictures of common objects. Labelling and naming things also appeals to three and four-year-olds, who tend to enjoy the letter and multiple object associations in the pictures.

Kindergarten and early primary children seem to enjoy the simple stories, rhymes, question or riddle ABCs, and the theme alphabets. An example of a rhyming ABC book could be a delightful story about the letters of the alphabet attempting to climb the trunk of the coconut tree and chanting as they are joined by other letters until the trunk begins to bend and they all tumble off. In one of the riddle ABC books, the reader is asked to guess the identity of the animal based on information found in the rhyme and the picture of the animal's tail. The animal's identity is shown on the following page.

Theme alphabet books tend to be of people and places, animals, or plant types. Anita Lobel and Arnold Lobel's *On Market Street* is a similar story of a child shopping and meeting tradespeople who are shaped in the letter of the alphabet. However, each of the letters is created by the shape of the objects. For example, the "B" for bookperson is drawn with stacks of books.

Another of the people-and-places ABC books is Margaret Musgrove's *Ashanti to Zulu: African Traditions*, illustrated by Leo and Diane Dillon. This book is the only ABC book to have ever won the Caldecott Medal. In a description of 26 different African tribes, from A to Z, the people are illustrated in tribal dress, showing their homes, animals, and treasured possessions. Another book with an African theme is Tom and Muriel Feelings' book, *Jambo Means Hello*, which is based on the Swahili language.

Animals are popular subjects for alphabet books. In *David McPhails' Animals A to Z*, there is no print, except the letters. The book begins with an aardvark staring at an ant. The B has a picture of an ear in a boat, reading a book. The animal theme is also the subject of Ann Jonas' *Aardvarks, Disembark* in which Noah calls many endangered species and lesser-known animals from the ark.

In a book suitable for older second and third graders, Jerry Pollotta wrote *The Furry Alphabet Book* with little-known animals. The A is for the "Aye-Aye", which looks like a monkey and lives in Madagascar. Each unusual animal is described in three or four sentences.

Another primary grades ABC book picturing animals is Jane Yolen's *All in the Woodland Early*, and illustrated by Jane Breskin Zalben. Yolen's verses and Zalben's illustrations represent each letter with an animal, a bird, and an insect in the natural woodlands setting. While Yolen's book is based on reality, the well-known Graeme Base's *Animalia* is packed with fantasy and fanciful illustrations. In the foreword, he challenges the reader to find a thousand things. In addition to illustrating the phrase for each letter, he ladens each inch of each picture with additional objects, living and fanciful things that represent the letter. In *Animalia*, B is for "Beautiful blue butterflies basking by a babbling brook".

Plants are presented in ABC format in a beautifully illustrated book by Anita Lobel, entitled *Allison's Zinnia*. The charming, appealing narrative combines the word play of ABCs, girls' names, herbs and flower names to create an absolutely delightful and beautiful book to look at and read. The alphabet book begins "Allison acquired an Amaryllis for Beryl". Rich in detail, each illustration is a flower painting (Raines & Canady 1992:214).

### 3.5.2 Counting books

Like alphabet books, counting books add to children's language as they begin to hear, see, and read the vocabulary of counting. While counting alone does not represent mathematical understanding of numbers and numeration, the counting book can help reinforce those associations.

Counting books range from the simple to the complex:

- (1) Simple numeral and picture associations showing one-to-one correspondence
- (2) Numeral, objects, and number word associations
- (3) Addition and subtraction
- (4) Story problems

Most counting books for young children begin with one and end with ten. Eric Carle's *My Very First Book of Numbers* is a simple counting book. The simplicity is also an appealing factor in Tana Hoban's photographic format in *Count and See*, but rather than stopping with the number ten, Hoban continues to one hundred and develops the concept of sets of ten. One hundred peas is pictured as ten peas in ten pods. Helen Oxenbury's *Numbers of Things* also goes beyond ten and follows the usual process of counting by tens, but with a surprise ending showing an astronaut asking, "How many stars?"

*Anno's Counting Book* is one of the books children can enjoy for both its simplicity and complexity. The young children can count the stack of cubes in the margins and associate them with the numeral. Older children make the connection of the twelve months of the year and the seasonal activities, and solve the puzzle of finding different sets of objects that represent the number. As in the eleventh month, there are the obvious eleven houses, but there are also eleven evergreens on the hill top, eleven sheep on the path, and so forth.

Counting in another language is the format for *Moja Means One* by Muriel and Tom Feelings. A parallel book to their alphabet book, *Jambo Means Hello*, the numbers are represented by groups of Swahili people.

One of the favourite children's literature books of all times is the story *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, and not necessarily for number concepts. Helping young children understand quantity, the Very Hungry Caterpillar ate through "one apple, but he was still hungry". As the story continues, the caterpillar eats through two pears, three plums, and so forth (Carle 1969).

Another story/counting book we highly recommend all teachers read to their children is Molly Bang's *Ten, Nine, Eight*. This is a book where a father says a poem to his little girl to get her ready for bed. It starts with "ten small toes all washed and warm" and continues counting down to finally "one big girl all ready for bed" (Raines & Canady 1989:172).

A number book illustrating subtraction is the text to a popular children's song, *Roll Over, A Counting Song* by Merle Peek. Peek illustrates this favourite counting song by showing a little boy who keeps rolling over in bed. Each time he rolls over, he imagines an animal falling out of the bed. By the time he counts backwards from ten to one, all the animals have fallen out of the bed and he has fallen asleep (Raines & Canady 1989:168).



While seldom classified as a counting book, Pat Hutchin's *The Doorbell Rang* is an example of a mathematical story problem embedded in the plot.

When evaluating counting books, the first criterion is the same one as for any picture book: "Does it appeal to the age and interest level of the readers?" A good match between the text and illustrations is particularly important for counting books. The child, as reader, listener, or viewer of the page, should be able to make easy associations between the number of objects, the numeral, and the number world.

### 3.5.3 Concept books

Alphabet books and counting books are concept books. The child's concept book is, in some ways, like the adult information book in its simplest form. A concept book helps the child to understand by making associations. As the young child's vocabulary expands, she or he begins to use descriptive words that classify by colour, shape, function, and other attributes.

Some books use photographs to illustrate concepts in a way that appeals to both preschool and kindergarten children. The reader can easily determine the main concept of the book from its title.

Several other authors are known for concept books. Donald Crews, for example, has published a series of books about transportation; *Truck, Freight Train, Flying, Harbour, School Bus, and Bicycle Race*. Another author who writes enjoyable concept books, but who isn't always fully appreciated by teachers, is Richard Scarry, who uses cartoonlike drawings and humour in his illustrations. For example, in his book *Cars, and Trucks and Things that Go*, there is a drawing of a pickle car. The children enjoy the entertainment of Scarry's books and since the books are so engaging, children make the concept associations.

Preschool and primary teachers often organise units around the seasons. Anne Rockwell's *Apples and Pumpkins*, illustrated by Lizzy Rockwell, has become a staple for a unit on Autumn. Using simple text and bright, simple illustrations, the story is told of a trip to a farm where there is an apple orchard and a pumpkin patch (Raines & Canady 1991:112).

The demarcation line between what a concept book is and what is classified as an information book becomes cloudier when the concept book is written for older children. Concept books for first and second graders tend to fall into the children's version of adult information books. Byron Barton's *Building a House* shows the whole intriguing process, from digging the foundation through each step of construction until the time the family moves in.

### 3.5.4 Wordless picture books

Young learners enjoy "reading" wordless books because they have the freedom to interpret these books any way they like. The value of the wordless picture book is the variations in the interpretations of the story — indeed, it is this variation that makes the wordless picture book a creative medium. Wordless books deserve a more in-depth treatment as a vehicle for children's developing language abilities, visual appeal, sense of story, and pleasure from interacting with books. Indeed, it is surprising that many preschool and elementary teachers neglect to use this valued resource in their classrooms.

The majority of teachers state that they use wordless picture books by placing them in the library corner of the classroom for browsing, which indicates that these books have a low level of instructional usage. However, these books are not regularly used by teachers from Grade 1 upwards; the greatest percentage of teachers who used wordless picture books were

preschool and kindergarten teachers. Regardless of grade level, teachers consistently identify three problems:

- (1) There are few wordless picture books available in library collections.
- (2) They do not know how to select quality wordless books.
- (3) Few know the variety of instructional uses for wordless picture books.

## *3.6 How to teach literature*

### 3.6.1 The teacher as decision-maker

Chapter 4 discusses the role of the teacher in the Communicative Approach in some detail. The teacher's role in the literature classroom is an extension of that role in any communicative classroom. Teachers play an important role in the selection of texts. For this reason they must read widely themselves and develop their own norms for quality and suitability. It also helps if the teacher likes the text. She or he will communicate this enthusiasm to the learners. An awareness of the learner's tastes and the purposes of reading fiction will enable the teacher to match books to specific readers or classes. To this end, the teacher evaluates texts in terms of merits, difficulties, quality, knowledge required, and factors such as situation, character, dialogue, relationships, and so on.

The teacher's role extends even further. She or he modifies text features, if necessary, thus increasing or decreasing the demand on learner resources. The teacher sets the goals in the lesson and these may be easy or difficult, depending on the responses required from readers. It is also the teacher who has to identify the level at which learners are experiencing difficulties with a text.

In order to decide how much teaching is required, the teacher can ask questions such as the following:

- Is the book directly accessible without teacher intervention?
- What possible approaches could be used? Does the book have a natural connection with other activities?
- How does it relate to the English course as a whole?
- How does it relate to the development of reading proficiency and literary competence?
- How relevant is it to the learners?
- If there are problems, how can they be resolved?

### 3.6.2 Reader-response approach

The first point to stress is that the teacher should not "kill literature" through word-by-word translations or by using the text purely as material for language acquisition. This is not to say that it should be treated as some sort of purely aesthetic experience, either. This will only frustrate and bore the secondary school learner.

What is the learner's role as reader? Is it to remember the "facts" of the text and the teacher's interpretation so that she or he can reproduce them in an examination? This certainly should not be the case but, unfortunately, it very often is. The learner should be actively involved in speculation and reassessment, and in questioning the text.

The focus must be on the individual learner's response to the text. The approach is learner-centred and the emphasis is on dynamic interaction in group and pair work. This encourages



chance-taking and individual response. Authors state that the teacher should develop the learner's "sense of himself in relation to a story" thus assisting him to assimilate it "into his own experience". They add: "Interacting includes everything that the reader brings from his own literacy and life experience to enable him to interpret a satisfying meaning from a story."

A reading journal can be used to give readers a place to record their responses as they occur. The writing in these journals could form the basis for the sharing and negotiation of meaning in groups. Even poor or unsophisticated readers will realise that they have something to contribute and that their own expectations and interpretations have value. In fact, it is fascinating to hear the discussion of a literary text based on reader-response. Weaker or more junior groups initially spend time sorting out what the story is about. There is constant reference to the text and a learner will often read a short section or even just a word or two to the group to reinforce a point. At this stage it is usually clear what each reader brings to the text, because this often determines the focus of her or his response. It is recommended that a reader-response approach be used with all literary texts.

Responses may be naive and uninformed, such as an immature or inexperienced reader might make, or they may be fairly sophisticated. The quality of the response depends on the past reading experience of each reader and her or his knowledge of textual and literary conventions. In order to respond, readers have to interact with a text both cognitively and effectively.

Response at school level varies during different phases of a lesson and in different standards or grades. Within a lesson, there is an initial response phase that is subjective (personal) and which relates to the reader's own life and experience. In the process of sharing and negotiating ideas in groups and then participating in focused re-readings, the initial response is elaborated upon and modified. A more informed response then emerges, one that is intersubjective (shared), and constructed from textual clues and the application of literary conventions. The difference between the initial response and the informed response is a measure of the learning that has taken place. This learning can be seen by comparing the initial responses in the journal with the reader's final responses to the text in other pieces of writing.

The initial response is essential, since it is this response that is the basis for the sharing and negotiation of meaning. It also indicates each reader's interests and goals for that text and establishes basic recognition and comprehension. Teachers will be surprised at how much learners actually discuss in groups. In a traditional, teacher-dominated classroom, the teacher often wastes time explaining a text to learners when they already understand it. The authoritarian teacher feels the need to transmit her or his knowledge to the learners and ends up boring them instead of helping them. Learners end up with knowledge about one story instead of a developing literary competence that they can transfer to the reading of any text.

The lesson described above will obviously cover more than one period. In fact, it would be better to use a double period for the lesson. If two separate periods are used, the teacher should break the activities at a natural point — for example, after the initial group work and feedback. The following period could be used for focused re-readings and post-reading activities. Group sharing and negotiation can take ten to twenty minutes. It is better to use less time, and leave learners feeling that they have not said all they want to say, than to have them sitting idly discussing other matters. It is typical of the excitement that can be generated by a good story that readers will be left feeling that there is more to say. Most teachers should be very pleased if learners leave the classroom still arguing about a story and come back the next day with further insights.

The rationale for using a reader-response approach in the communicative classroom can be summed up in the following words:

Unless we structure the classroom experience so as to make *the learners* discover what is there, we are not really teaching literature — it takes 30 seconds to state the theme of a story. It will probably take an entire class period to work through to the point where students themselves can articulate the story. But if our underlying goal is always to involve our students communicatively in the classroom, to enable them to discover what is significant, instead of just telling them what they should have seen... then we must be willing to cover fewer points.

Reader involvement implies group work and the next section deals with the way in which teachers can structure activities that will involve all learners.

### 3.6.3 An activity-based approach

A reader-response approach is task and activity-based. Variety and balance are important, as are the abilities and interests of the learners. Activities can include listening comprehension, oral reading (especially in poetry and plays), problem solving, dramatisation, discussions, role play, debates and writing.

## QUESTIONS

Learners should be encouraged to question the text continually from their first reading of the title to moments of reflection long after they have read the text. “Why is this book called *The catcher in the rye*?”; “What is this book *To kill a mockingbird* going to be about? It sounds like hunting. Maybe it is, then I shan’t like it.” “*Murder in the vicarage* sounds like an exciting detective story. I wonder if it is?” The opening paragraphs or scenes of a longer work give rise to any number of questions along the lines of “Is this book going to be as exciting/boring as it sounds?”

Through group and pair work and journal-keeping learners should be encouraged to make these questions explicit. This response will enable them to realise that their own questions and expectations are a valuable part of the reading process.

From the beginning, the teacher should use the question-answer technique to elicit the personal responses of readers and guide them to reflect both on what they read and their own reading processes. Questions can relate to their enjoyment or otherwise of the text, the relationships they perceive between the characters, what they learn about themselves or other people while reading, what — besides the story — interests them in a text such as a novel, and so on. Poor readers will probably focus on what happens next, while more experienced readers will start to empathise with characters, wonder about their motivations, generalise the concerns in the text to their own lives and so on. (It is essential to group poor readers with good ones so that they begin to perceive other dimensions to reading.) Only sophisticated readers (and these are not necessarily older learners) will start to question the ideology of the text and the role that both the reader and the writer have in constructing meaning. For this reader, the teacher’s questions can focus on using the facts to establish relationships and make inferences or generalisations. Questions can also lead learners to identify conventions such as comparisons (smiles, metaphors and personification) and contrasts (irony) and their effects. These questions all focus on text or context. The jargon of literary criticism should be avoided, particularly in the junior secondary school, although there is no harm in learners knowing terms such as *alliteration*, *theme*, *conflict*, and so on, if their use facilitates discussion. The use of terminology is part of a developing literary competence, but the words should always be learnt and used in context.

There is one important last point to make about questions. Teachers should avoid questions that reduce a literary text to mere comprehension exercises. Questions that focus on the

“facts” of a text and give no consideration to reader response, conventions and the meaning-making process do not develop literary competence and transferable skills.

## LANGUAGE

The study of language is an inevitable part of literature. Necessary structures should be pre-taught or only clarified once they have been encountered in the text. One focus should be on the underlying function of the utterances (for example, to challenge, protest, evade, accept, and so on). Another area of interest is the writer’s reasons for using language in a specific way; her or his organisation, as well as grammatical and lexical choices are pertinent, as is the way in which these influence meaning and mood and reveal attitude. It is also possible, sometimes, to note how parallel or repeated structures are used for emphasis. This type of language use is intrinsic to a text.

Learners’ language use can also be external to the text, however. Various activities require specific language structures that learners must be taught. Anticipation requires the use of modals such as *might*, *may* and *could*. Discussions of choices or critical moments require the use of the subjunctive: *If he had not done X, Y would not have happened.*

## VOCABULARY

Key words and phrases that are central to a text can be pre-taught. In a longer text the repetition of key vocabulary often leads to its acquisition. In some texts the important words are semantically related; for example, in a story on soccer, the reader will come across terms related to soccer and sport; in a play about betrayal, the writer will use words related to this theme; in a novel based in an African country, many of the words that are strange to South African readers might relate to the food, environment or customs of the specific group of people who live in that country.

One of the most important activities related to vocabulary in literature is the acquisition of words to describe the subtle nuances of human behaviour. A list of basic human emotions such as love, hate, fear or anger can be drawn up. In groups, learners can suggest shades of emotion within each category in relation to a specific text. Remember, all learning must be contextualised. A thesaurus (dictionary of synonyms and antonyms) or an ordinary dictionary can be used by older learners. Learners can then match these traits to specific characters. Such an activity could be preceded by tasks that require learners to describe photographs or even simple line drawings of faces (for example, drawings showing a happy face with an upturned mouth, a sad or disapproving face with a down turned mouth, a surprised face with wide-open eyes, and so on).

## WRITING

Writing activities can be guided, literary or creatively. Guided writing includes answering questions and expanding frameworks into summaries. An over-emphasis on the writing of summaries can become a burden to learners and cause them to dislike reading, so this type of activity should not be used to excess.

Literature can also serve as the stimulus for creative, interactive writing (beyond the Foundation Phase). Learners could write *Chapter 0* of a novel (saying what happens before the story starts), a description of what happens off-stage during a play, endings for various texts, poems, and so on. By doing this, learners will show their awareness of the context of the literary work and they will learn to use *object language* or language similar to that used in the object of study, that is, the literary text.

### 3.6.4 Creating a rich literary environment

The comics of yesterday are obviously far outdistanced by the television and video games of today. In the face of such competition, how can teachers get children involved in literature?

The field of children's literature is rich in its variety, and includes great classics and contemporary literature. Fiction and informational books, children's magazines, and poetry add balance to the literary curriculum. Every classroom should contain representative works from each of these areas.

Provide plenty of time for using books and other materials. Children need time to browse, to flip through a book at their own pace, and to let their thoughts wander as they reflect on the storyline. They also enjoy retelling the tale to others. Be sure to plan enough time for children to be read to every day.

Make a space that is quiet and comfortable. Apart from providing soft pillows or seats, locate the reading area in a place where there is privacy. Crashing blocks and messy fingerpainting will intrude on the book reader. A place to sprawl or cuddle up with a friend is preferable.

Make sure there are plenty of books and support materials. The language arts centre might contain a listening post, with headsets for a record or tape player. Perhaps there is even a place where books can be created, that is, a place supplied with paper and crayons. There may even be a typewriter, puppet stage, or flannel board nearby so that stories can be created in new ways.

Display children's literary creations. The efforts of children's stories and bookmaking should be honoured by establishing a place in the room where they can be seen and read. Doing this enables children to see that adults value the process of literary creation and the final product.

Teachers must set a good example in caring for books and keep classroom books in good repair. Children can come to realise that a book is like a good friend and should be given the same kind of care and consideration.

Encouraging children's reading at home is one of the important contributions a teacher can make to the reading process. Attitudes about reading are communicated to children from the important people in their lives. Because teachers do not have a direct influence on the home environment, their route to the home is through the children. A child who is enthusiastic about books and carries them home is likely to involve parents in the quest for good books and stories. Teachers can encourage this in a number of ways. Encourage parents to read good quality literature by making "book bags", that is, large plastic ziplock bags in which the children can select a book from the classroom to read overnight and return the next day. Posting the local library hours, establishing a lending library, and providing parents with lists of favourites will reinforce the child's interest in literature.

Use books around the room. Don't confine them to just the book corner or the book shelf. Demonstrate their adaptability to all curriculum areas by displaying a variety of books in the activity centres. Ask children to help you retell or emphasise parts of a story and then ask them questions informally afterwards: "How many bowls of porridge were on the kitchen table? Which one did Goldilocks like best? How did you know?" Figure 13.23 shows how books can enhance play and learning throughout the school room.

### 3.6.5 Extending literary experiences

Good literature comes in many forms and can be presented in a variety of ways. A creative teacher uses books and literature to develop other curriculum materials. Translating words from a book into an activity helps children to remember these words. Books and stories can

be adapted to the flannel board, storytelling, dramatisations, puppets, book games, and audiovisual resources. One particularly useful resource for expanding children's book experiences is *Story Stretches* (Raines & Canady 1989:189).

## STORYTELLING

Storytelling is as old as humanity itself. The first time a human being returned to the cave with an adventure to tell, the story was born. Storytelling is the means by which a cultural heritage is passed down from one generation to another. Children's involvement in a story being told is almost instantaneous. The storyteller is the medium through which a story comes to life, adding a unique flavour through voice, choice of words, body language, and pacing.

Stories that have a few characters, plenty of repetition, and a clear sequence of events make for easy listening as far as young children are concerned. Fairy tales have all these elements, and contain important truths for children. These tales are fascinating, since, in a child's words, "they think about what I think about". Fairy tales answer basic questions such as "Who Am I?", "What will happen to me, and how should I act?" Moreover, these stories assure the child of a positive outcome while allowing them to experience some of the hard and frightening aspects of life. Critics of fairy tales argue that many are stereotyped; others assert that the characteristics embodied in fairy tale roles are about the good and bad in us all, and that the teacher who uses fairy tales — particularly from many cultures — will find that children learn the results of kindness and evil in themselves and others.

Teachers can use *any* familiar story, be it *The Three Little Pigs* or *Madeline*. Props can be added to draw attention to the story. Flannel board adaptations of stories are helpful; they give the storyteller a sense of security and a method for remembering the story. Children can be involved in the action by placing the characters on the felt board at the appropriate time. Puppets or an assortment of hats can be used as props. Good storytellers enjoy telling the story and communicate their enthusiasm to children.

## DRAMATISING STORIES

Acting out characters from a favourite story has universal appeal. Young preschoolers are introduced to this activity as they act out the motions to fingerplays and songs. "The Eensy-Weensy Spider" and its accompanying motions is the precursor for dramatisation. Story re-enactment helps children learn to work together, so that their *social development* is enhanced, as is their cognitive ability to engage in *collective representation*. Whether the child is an observer, walk-on, mime, or actor, the learning is real in each step of the continuum.

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## *Study unit 4*

# *Selecting suitable literature for young children*

### **Outcomes**

After completing this study unit, you should be able to:

- recognise and apply the criteria for good literature when choosing suitable stories, poetry and rhymes to use in early childhood teaching
- discuss and apply the criteria for selecting fantasy (fiction) stories that are suitable for children
- discuss and apply the criteria for the selection of realistic (nonfiction) stories suitable for young children
- distinguish developmental characteristics of children that guide the selection of good literature
- recognise individual differences in children and identify good literature that meets the child's particular interest

### *4.1 Introduction*

The goal that we wish to attain when presenting children's literature can be realised only if we choose literature suitable for young children. In the selection of suitable, good literature, we need to bear in mind the criteria for good children's literature. Although all children's stories should comply with the general criteria for good literature, it is important to be aware of additional criteria for selecting different types (genres) of stories. The following types will be looked at:

- fantasy stories
- realistic stories



#### **REMEMBER:**

"A children's book should be judged for the pleasure it gives, for its style and its quality, as any other book is judged" (Bowden, as quoted by Sutherland & Arbuthnot 1991:55).



## 4.2 *Specific criteria for choosing fantasy stories*

When is a story fantasy?

Fantasy stories are created from an author's imagination. They are stories with actions and events that cannot happen in real life as we know it. These stories present the magical, the unreal, the supernatural or the impossible. A fantasy story creates a world which does not correspond to reality as perceived by our senses, yet it all happens within a framework of self-contained logic (Glazer 1997:360–363; Sutherland & Arbuthnot 1991:262).

### 4.2.1 The difficulty of writing fantasy stories

A fantasy story is the most difficult kind of children's story to write. Pienaar (1981:90) maintains that fantasy stories make very special demands on a writer. Inexperienced writers who are just starting to write children's books are particularly prone to think that a children's story can only be a fantasy, because the ability to fantasise is still so strong in young children. Another reason for choosing this form is that "anything is possible" in a fantasy story. The writer believes that a fantasy story will permit him or her a great deal of freedom since a child's capacity to imagine even the impossible will render anything acceptable. As a result, what happens is that the fantasy element becomes a kind of crutch which has to compensate for the weaknesses of the story. The crutch often takes the form of a series of events that actually say nothing. The fantasy elements are used to try and give some originality to a tale that would be too ordinary without the fantasy — but with little success.

These are also the reasons for the unfortunate availability of fantasy stories which offer the young child very little more than a way to pass (waste?) the time. Good fantasies are scarce and teachers need to be very selective when choosing fantasy stories for use in an early childhood centre.

It is important to remember that the criteria to be discussed are for fantasy stories that one tells to a **group** of children in an ECD centre or Foundation Phase in a primary school. The criteria for recounting fantasy to a child (either at home or in a therapeutic situation), or to an older child will be different. In a group we have to cater for children on different developmental levels and from a variety of backgrounds.

### 4.2.2 The value of fantasy stories for the young child

Although some educationists feel that fantasy stories do not belong in an ECD centre there are also those who believe that fantasy stories are very important in the young child's development.

Fantasy stories have the following points of value:

- To young children, the world of fantasy is just as real as the concrete and material world. Fantasies are important for developing their imagination, which is an essential ingredient of creativity and creative thinking.
- Because fantasy is not confined to the boundaries of time and space of the real world, but lies beyond them, children become aware that they could look for other possibilities and solutions to problems beyond the known and the familiar.

- A lack of fantasy during the child's early years can result in a flawed orientation to reality later in life.
- Because it stimulates the child's creativity, exposure to good fantasy stories is important to balance some of the negative influences of television.

#### 4.2.3 Guidelines for good fantasy stories

- *The story should be logical and should make sense.* One of the most important criteria for a good fantasy story is that the story "makes sense". There must be a sense of order and the events should occur in a logical sequence. The fantasy element must be acceptable within the framework of the impossible.
- *Stories should have a properly constructed structure.* A fantasy should be properly constructed, with a beginning, a build-up to a dramatic climax, and a conclusion. The story should be absorbing. Fantasy, like any other genre, also deals with universal values, and it is therefore a form which the writer can use to say something that has meaning. In fact, it is more important to do so in a fantasy than in the other types of children's stories, because fantasy is not bound to a specific time and place. It moves in the world of the imagination, which is universal (Pienaar 1981:92).
- *No excessive violence.* Because "everything is possible" fantasy stories can be very violent. Fantasy stories that have a lot of violence and elements that provoke too much anxiety are not suitable for very young children. An example is the well-known *Snow White*. The stepmother wants Snow White killed and then she wants to eat her liver! Very young children, especially in a group, can be upset by this kind of story line and such actions.

*The element of violence.* Fables and myths in particular often have an element of violence, and should be avoided for children under six. Some traditional fables, however, are very suitable for the child in the Foundation Phase.

- *The underlying message should not be too abstract.* Traditional fantasy stories often have an underlying symbolism. Abstract ideas such as revenge, hatred, good and evil are the underlying messages. These ideas (and/or the symbolism) are too abstract for a young child. When assessing a fantasy story, make sure that the underlying message or symbolism is within the grasp of the young child.
- *Fantasies are only for children who are developmentally ready.* Fantasy stories may cause some anxiety in very young children (children under the age of four), who are still unsure about the difference between **fact** and **fantasy**. A fantasy story that creates a completely new and unfamiliar world can be upsetting to a very young child. For this reason be careful when you choose fantasy stories for a group under four years of age. Make sure that they know the difference between fact and fiction.
- *Stories with fairies as main characters are seldom successful.* Be careful when assessing stories about fairies, because they often do not meet the criteria of logic, sense and meaning. Many writers use fairy characters without having any particular aim in mind by doing so. Fantasy creatures are often chosen to play the main characters simply to camouflage a weak story. Pienaar (1981:96) points out that whereas writers often use fairies as characters because they think that children will believe in them, they themselves do not believe in these characters. This is not to say, of course, that the writers of successful fantasy stories need to be superstitious people who believe that fairies really exist. But the fantasy world they create, and the characters who live in that world, must come alive for the writer, before they can come alive, and be convincing, for the child. Clearly, therefore, fairy tales need to be carefully evaluated, and cannot be regarded as unreservedly suitable (or unsuitable) for the young child.



- *Personification of characters.* One of the elements of fantasy that requires sensitive treatment is the personification of the characters.

### *4.3 Animal stories*

Personification of characters is a technique used to bestow human characteristics and emotions on nonhuman objects and animals.

It is easy to recognise this type of fantasy. The animals and/or objects usually wear clothes, and nonhuman objects usually have eyes, hands and feet, like humans. This kind of fantasy can be very successful, as long as the writer does not simply resort to personification as a way of livening up a weak, illogical and meaningless story.

Because animal stories with elements of personification are so popular we shall discuss this type of fantasy story in more detail.

#### 4.3.1 Animal stories containing personification

The personification of characters in animal stories is an important theme in literature for young children.

Good animal stories, using personification, must adhere to all the requirements for a good fantasy story plus additional requirements.

When applying the elements of personification to animal stories, we can distinguish the following two types of stories:

##### 4.3.1.1 Stories featuring animals behaving entirely like humans

The conduct and emotions of the animals, and what happens to them, are completely human. There is nothing in the story to suggest that the main character is an animal.

##### 4.3.1.2 Stories featuring animals with human emotions

In these stories the animal characters retain some of their animal qualities and characteristics while at the same time experiencing human emotions often accompanied by the ability to talk.

### *4.4 Realistic animal stories*

#### 4.4.1 Guiding principles for stories

In realistic stories the intrigue, plot and illustrations are true to life and all facts are also true. No elements of personification are allowed. The nonfictional animal story falls into this category.

Animal stories featuring personification must adhere to the following principles:

- It is important for a balance to be struck between animal and human attributes otherwise the story loses credibility.
- The writer of a good animal fantasy story may deliberately humanise a character in order to make the character more credible and give the story a universal significance. Certain human qualities are emphasised in the animal characters and, by a process of personification, the story is imbued with universal relevance. For example, in *The tortoise and the hare*, the attributes of overconfidence and endurance are emphasised by the choices the characters make.
- Because young children have an emotionally charged view of animals, the emotional response evoked by the animal characters heightens the emotional potential and meaning of the story. Certain animals have traditional and even universal associations: the wise owl, the industrious ant, the sly jackal and the wicked wolf. These characters are used deliberately to convey these human traits in a story.
- As in any other fantasy story, the element of fantasy should be bounded by a certain degree of logic and order. Personification may on no account be used as a front to disguise a poor story.
- Stories involving talking animals that display human emotions such as joy, sadness and loneliness are perceived by the child to be totally believable. Young children regard animals as their companions. Should animals be depicted as talking, what they say should be convincing within the context of the story, and appropriate to that particular character's nature and capabilities.
- The emotions displayed by the animals should be authentic and bear some relation to the real existence and physical abilities of the animal, in order to be truly convincing.
- Animals wearing clothes come across with complete credibility, especially in fantasy stories for the very young in which animals are completely humanised, that is, depicted as humans in the form of animals. Conversely, a character will lack credibility if, in the story, it plays its natural role as an animal as Harry does in the *Harry* series and **still** wears clothes. Even though he experiences human emotions, he still remains a pet. He would certainly lose credibility if he wore clothes.

In a realistic animal story it is not acceptable for the animal to wear clothes.

As in all the other elements of personification, clothing or lack of it, must be linked with the nature and essence of the character.

- In a good animal story there ought to be a correlation between the "new" fantasy world and the reality already known to the preschooler.
- Animal stories containing personification are not easy to write, but a successful story in this genre is attractive not just to young children but also to children of all cultures because of its universal nature.

#### 4.4.2 Specific criteria for choosing realistic stories

When is a story realistic?

In a realistic story all the elements of the story, including the characters, the plot and the setting, are true to life. All the events in the story could therefore take place in real life.

When evaluating a realistic story you should consider the following criteria:

#### 4.4.2.1 Style of writing

- The writing style in a realistic story should be positive and interesting, and language should be properly and effectively used.
- Language usage should contribute to sketching the background, the characters and the setting in which the story unfolds.
- An excess of humour is not appropriate in a realistic story.
- There should be no conflict between fantasy (the impossible) and reality (the real world).
- The writer should make it absolutely clear when a statement is factual and when it is an opinion.
- Theological explanations and definitions should be carefully assessed, since the writing style used is so often moralistic, sentimental and lacking in genuineness.
- Dialogue should not be moralistic or unnecessarily didactic.
- Make sure that the language and information are not biased.
- Since words can have a culturally historical dimension, make sure that there are no possibly derogatory words (eg “boy” when referring to a grown man).

#### 4.4.2.2 Character development

- All the characters in a realistic story — people, animals or objects — should be true to life.
- The interactions and relationships between characters should be believable.
- Characters’ behaviour should fit in with their age and background.
- Any development or change in the characters should have a logical justification.
- Personification (animals or any nonhuman object with human characteristics such as speech, clothes and human emotions) is not permissible. Animals must be represented as animals and objects as objects.
- The characters should not be stereotyped.

#### 4.4.2.3 Theme

- Popular themes include the relationship between adults and children, the acceptance of oneself and others, the ability to solve problems and the importance of cooperation.
- Themes like death, divorce and child neglect are often dealt with in modern realistic stories. Themes such as these should always be handled in a sympathetic, but not sentimental way. The writing style in these story books should be positive.
- A good realistic story gives a child support in her attempts to understand what it means to grow up, and in her efforts to do so.
- Realistic stories help young children to realise that others have the same fears, feelings and problems as those that they experience, and that they **can** overcome their difficulties.
- A good realistic story should help a young child to see a problem or a problem situation in a proper light.

#### 4.4.2.4 Plot development

- The action should be believable.
- The events should follow a logical course and should have a logical, justifiable outcome.

- There should be no subplots in the stories for the under-six-year-old but, even in a simple story, the action and events should convey the central idea in an absorbing way.

#### 4.4.2.5 Facts

- One of the most important criteria for a realistic story is that all the facts should be correct. Realistic stories should contain no incorrect concepts, and should not simplify a topic to such an extent that the facts become distorted.
- It is unacceptable for certain facts to be deliberately emphasised or left out in order to convey a biased perspective. Information should be unbiased.
- The facts should tie in with the young child's experiences, understanding and development.
- A good realistic story takes into account young children's ability to conceptualise, and conveys facts that will strengthen their concept formation.
- The information in the books should enrich the child's life with the correct information about various cultures, habits and languages. The emphasis should be on the diversity of people, and customs throughout the world (for older children), while focusing on the sameness of needs in terms of love, belonging, security, respect and so on.

#### 4.4.2.6 Illustrations

- Illustrations should be detailed and factually correct.
- They should integrate with and enhance the written information.
- Illustrations should give children additional information about a theme and familiarise them with new concepts.
- The illustrations should represent a diversity of people, in a diversity of roles and situations. The illustrations should not be stereotypes of reality.

#### 4.4.2.7 A check list to make sure that a realistic book has neither bias nor any stereotypes

The following is a check list to make sure that a realistic book has neither bias nor any stereotypes:

- Examine the setting in which the story takes place. Is it a true reflection of reality?
- Examine the language, especially for derogatory words.
- Check the illustrations for stereotyping.
- Check the story line for role models and lifestyles — does it reflect the diversity of life?

### *4.5 Characteristics of the young child*

#### 4.5.1 Introduction

The characteristics of the young child are important guidelines for choosing suitable literature. By taking them as our point of departure, we can identify a number of requirements to be met by literature suitable for children. Knowing how children develop and being aware of their individual differences helps you to decide which books may be suitable for them as a group and as individuals.

## 4.5.2 Developmental characteristics that help with the selection of suitable literature

To promote literacy in young children, it is advisable for teachers to identify good literature and then try to match it with the child's particular interest. Before the teacher gets to know the child well, he or she must learn the key features in children's development and reading preferences as the first step to selecting books for particular ages.

### 4.5.2.1 Cognitive development

Cognitive or intellectual development refers to how children think and how their thinking and reasoning change over time. The discussion is based on Piaget's theory of intellectual development which explains that when children grow, so do their abilities to organise experience. As children hear stories, they develop experience of what a story is and this accounts for the different ways children react to stories.

Please refer to the prescribed book (Glazer 1986:12), for the Piagetian stages and implications for book selection.

### 4.5.2.2 Moral development

Age is often not a good indication of maturity and one cannot predict whether a child can differentiate between right or wrong simply on the basis of age. However, there are general patterns of behaviour that can point to development of moral judgement. Very young children are egocentric and as they grow older they develop the skill of understanding the different viewpoints of others and become less self-centred. Some researchers (eg Kohlberg) maintain that males and females may approach moral decisions from different points of view while others assert that boys and girls are the same but are socialised differently. As they explore children's reactions to the actions of characters in the book, they may be making judgements using different frames of reference that are gender based.

### 4.5.2.3 Social and emotional development

Social development in children is linked to their intellectual development, particularly to their ability to accept the viewpoint of another person. Experience contributes significantly to this development as it does to other aspects of growth. The older a child is, the more likely he or she will be able to see multiple aspects of a situation. According to social learning theorists like Bandura, children's behaviour is shaped by role modeling within contexts.

With regard to emotional development, as the children grow older, they learn to talk about their feelings. From age four to seven, they can match appropriate emotional responses to a situation. At these stages children develop friendships as well and this helps them to get a sense of personal identity or of self-image that ultimately shapes their personalities.

### 4.5.2.4 Language development

It is generally accepted that all children's language develops in the same manner although at different rates. It is also accepted that the greatest growth occurs during the preschool years and continues through the elementary years. Exposure to good literature contributes to children's vocabulary and syntax.

By having regular conversations with the teacher, they learn to see how language can be used creatively. Home environments in which adults and older siblings read regularly to the young ones, help to develop reading interest. Children also learn to appreciate print material

and to relate the written word to speaking. By age three they can distinguish between art and literature.

#### 4.5.2.5 Aesthetic development

Young children learn to appreciate the beauty in art and develop the ability to create art. Regular contact with art work helps them to understand what the scribbling stands for and encourages them to try it on their own. As they grow older, their art work becomes complex and indicates size and different dimensions.

### 4.5.3 Criteria for the selection of suitable children's literature

Now that you have been introduced to the characteristics of children — let us examine, in greater detail, the criteria for choosing suitable stories. Criteria for assessing stories may be divided into four groups:

- criteria relating to the child
- literary criteria
- criteria for illustrations
- technical requirements

#### 4.5.3.1 Criteria relating to the young child

##### **a Criteria associated with the young child's emotions**

The emotional criteria which children's stories should meet include the following:

- *Identification.* Good stories should offer the child sufficient opportunities for identification. Their content should therefore include incidents and characters that link up with incidents or periods in a child's life.
- *Enjoyment.* Children should be able to enjoy the story, because that is why they want to listen to stories in the first place! Stories provide adults with opportunities to guide children gradually towards the ability to enjoy more difficult and longer stories.
- *Moderate emotion.* The emotion aroused by a story should not be too powerful, since very young children in particular get completely caught up in a story. Excessive fear and sorrow, as well as overdramatisation, should be avoided in a children's story because these could lead to feelings of insecurity.
- *Security.* The young child needs to feel safe. Stories should always have a happy ending because young children identify so wholeheartedly with the main characters in a story that their sorrows and defeats become theirs as well.

##### **b Criteria associated with the young child's intellectual abilities**

The exposition of the story, and the character development, should be systematic and consistent. A story is convincing when it is written from a child's point of view. The story should also be logical (or have an underlying sense of logic).

##### **c Criteria associated with the young child's normative development**

Children's stories should be based on a natural feeling for values, without any serious and obvious moralising.

#### 4.5.4 The literary requirements of a good children's story

The literary requirements of a good children's story include the following:

- *Theme.* The theme should be suitable for young children. It should link up closely with the child's own experience. The younger the child, the more the theme should revolve around her as a person. Themes for older children can have a wider scope than the self and the immediate home environment.
- *Plot.* The plot (in other words the story or the action) should correlate with the young child's level of development and interests. In the plot, everyday events or events from the world of fantasy should be structured in such a way that they are understandable to the young child. Also, the actions must be within the child's understanding of how the world around him functions.
- *Character development.* The characters in the story should be convincingly developed. They should come alive from descriptions and illustrations; from their actions and the way they speak. We may also use the symbolic connotations that have, over the years, come to be associated with specific characters.
- *Style and language usage.* Good writers pay a lot of attention to their style and language usage. Apart from being grammatically correct, the writing style should be sensitive enough to allow the child to experience a particular atmosphere.
- *Anti-bias.* It is important that the story does not reflect any bias regarding culture, religion, gender, race, age or language.

When selecting a story book, make sure that it includes a variety of people and situations. For example, choose books with nontraditional (single parent) families.

- Make sure that girls and women who are featured in the stories are reflected as being effective and strong.
- Select stories in which problems that are familiar to children happen to nontraditional characters. These should be stories containing situations which the children are able to identify with but which contain characters varying in terms of ethnicity, sex, age and occupation.
- There should be **no stereotyping** of characters. Stereotyping means that all the individuals belonging to a particular group are presented as being identical.
  - Stories should not reflect any stereotyping of characters.
  - Stereotyping is socially and intellectually offensive. People are individuals, and stereotyped characters are never convincing.
  - A good children's story should give a child insight into the immense variety in human nature.
  - Stereotyping can lead children to become prejudiced at a stage when they are especially susceptible to this.
  - Racism, sexism and stereotyped images of age and growing old are all examples of stereotypes that should be avoided. For instance, male characters could express emotions and female characters could be ambitious and adventurous. Grandfathers and grandmothers are very frequently portrayed as stereotypes in children's books.
- *Structure.* The structure of a children's story is a very important element.
  - A story structure that is particularly suitable for children between the ages of two and three/four is the *accumulative* structure. This structure makes use of a theme, and the story consists of adding the incidents one after another.
  - A *chronological structure* is suitable for the child from three years upwards. In this



structure a story is told as it happens in time. This is a very suitable structure for children under the age of seven, because most of them are not yet able to follow subplots and flashbacks.

- The *classical structure of introduction*, building up to a *climax*, and *conclusion* is suitable for the child of three years and older, and is often used in children's stories.

#### 4.5.5 Criteria for illustrations

Here we are dealing with two art forms — literature and visual art — which are intended, in this context, to complement each other. Illustrations thus have to be of a high aesthetic standard. Illustrations form an important part of a good children's storybook for two reasons:

- They contribute to the child's understanding of the book.
- They help to develop the child's appreciation of the visual arts.

The following criteria apply when assessing the illustrations of a children's book:

- *Text and illustrations must form a unit.* The illustrations should help tell the story. Books for children under seven should be such that a child can "read" the story without looking at the text.
- *Text and illustrations must correlate.* This does not mean they should simply repeat one another but that they should enhance one another so that, for example, they demonstrate more clearly the passage of time, or a character's state of mind.
- *Position.* The illustrations should fit in with the text, and should appear immediately opposite or, if that is not possible, immediately after the relevant section of text (otherwise the development of the story is interrupted).
- *Illustrations must represent the diversity of and in people.* Illustrations in a good story book should reflect the diversity of people in the world. Once again, the illustrations should not stereotype people by having, say, a male figure working in the garden while a female figure is cooking food.
- *Illustrations as works of art.* Illustrations should be artwork in their own right, and should therefore be judged as an art form, with particular reference to the following:

##### 4.5.5.1 Colour

Colours should harmonise with the atmosphere of the book.

##### 4.5.5.2 Line

This should suit the type of story (delicate or bold lines) and should convey the feeling of movement.

##### 4.5.5.3 Form

This refers to the artist's control over the medium. Here one could ask the following questions:

- Is the perspective correct?
- If the illustrations are realistic, are the main features of the subject correctly represented?
- Do the illustrations show knowledge of the objects that are portrayed?
- Do the illustrations add to the character of the objects?



#### 4.5.5.4 Texture

The texture of the illustrations must be varied and should suggest the object that is discussed. For example a book covered in wool could do well to represent animal stories about sheep. The texture should always complement the story.

#### 4.5.5.5 Composition

The illustrations should have unity and balance, and a focus point. They should also enhance and accentuate the atmosphere of the story.

#### 4.5.5.6 Style

This should fit in with the nature and tone of the story. The following styles are usually used for children's books:

##### **a Folkloristic illustrations (especially in traditional literature)**

These are simple, symmetrical illustrations. The colours are bright with little shading or in black and white only. They are particularly suitable for folk tales.

##### **b Realistic illustrations**

These have a lot of detail and are suitable for realistic stories or books that convey factual information.

##### **c Impressionistic illustrations**

These have a certain "freedom" or flexibility of media and colour usage — the longer the child looks at the picture, the more details she sees. They are especially suitable for fantasy stories.

##### **d Modern illustrations**

In these we find only the occasional point of contact with reality, and this type of illustration is exceptionally well suited to fantasies.

##### **e Cartoon illustrations**

Here certain aspects of the objects in the pictures are exaggerated purely to emphasise certain characteristics (eg Dr Seuss's *The cat in the hat*). The very young child prefers realistic illustrations. It is however necessary to expose children from the age of four to all the different types of illustration as part of their visual education.

#### 4.5.5.7 Photographs

There is some difference of opinion regarding the use of photographs to illustrate children's books. Critics of the practice feel that photographs include too much detail and leave nothing to the child's imagination. In addition, they maintain that photographs are too static and do not suggest movement. Those who support the use of photographs feel that photography is an art form to which young children should be introduced.

## *4.6 Technical requirements*

Technical requirements revolve around the overall appearance of the book — the total impression it makes on the child (and the adult). One would pay attention to the following:

### 4.6.1 Size and format

These should fit in with the theme of the story. Note that an unusual format can highlight the plot.

### 4.6.2 Binding

This should be sturdy. The book's spine should not simply be gummed or glued together but should be stitched as well.

### 4.6.3 Paper

This should be of a good quality, and the printing should be clear.

### 4.6.4 Design and layout

The page layout, that is, the positioning of the text and the illustrations, is an important element. A page that is overloaded with haphazardly placed illustrations is likely to be confusing to a young child.

### 4.6.5 Typeface

The typeface chosen for the printing should suit the atmosphere or tone of the story. For example, large bold type would suit a humorous story, while delicate lettering would suit a fantasy. The printing should not be visible on the reverse side of a page.

### 4.6.6 Cover

The book's cover should be attractive and should invite the young child to open it and start paging through it.

## *4.7 Self-evaluation questions*

### **Long questions on Study unit 4**

- (1) Explain why it is difficult to select good fantasy stories for young children and what guidelines you would follow to select good ones.
- (2) Write an essay about animal stories containing personification. What is your opinion regarding their use in the early childhood learning development centre.
- (3) What are the important elements of a realistic story? The discussion in your answer should have special reference to the very young child.
- (4) Discuss the child's characteristics that should be noted in the selection of good literature.

**Short questions on Study unit 4**

- (1) Mention the four values of fantasy stories that are suitable for the young child.
- (2) When does a story contain personification not acceptable for young children and how can you improve on such a story?
- (3) Mention all the elements of a realistic story.
- (4) How can illustrations in a children's book enhance the quality of the story that is related.
- (5) How can you ensure that a children's book contains neither bias nor stereotypes?
- (6) Children's books and stories should meet certain criteria in order to be regarded as good books or stories. Discuss those criteria that relate to the child.
- (7) Briefly refer to the literary requirements of a good children's story.

## *Study unit 5*

# *Children's stories suitable for the different age groups in early childhood teaching*

### **Outcomes**

After completing this study until, you should be able to:

- identify suitable stories and books for the different age groups
- discuss why children of particular ages prefer certain types of literature

## *5.1 Introduction*

We have discussed the criteria to use when you want to select good stories, rhymes and verses for young children. These were general criteria. We are now going to look in greater detail at suitable stories and books for the different age groups in early childhood development.

## *5.2 Stories and books suitable for children under one year*

We need to keep the following in mind when choosing books for babies:

- Babies are at the very beginning of their discovery of the world around them.
- They need continual repetition of what they know and what is familiar.
- Babies can only give their attention to an activity for a very short time.
- Babies of under a year have not yet reached the language stage, but the basis for language is being laid at this time, and it is vital for them to hear language.
- Babies have little control over their muscles, and are only just beginning to grasp things with their fingers.
- Babies have a strong need for love and physical contact.

The points above are all important when choosing books that are right for babies. To the uninitiated, it may sound strange to want to give a book to a little creature who is not even able to talk yet. But, babies **do** need books.

The following more specific points should also be kept in mind:

- Look for books with simple pictures of objects babies can see and will know from their immediate environment.  
There is a huge variety of “first books” available from bookshops, but many of them are overseas books, and the pictures do not always fit in with the life-world of a South African child (they contain pictures of skiing and snow, and a “white” Christmas, for example).
- The book’s pages should be very strong — preferably made of cardboard or cloth.
- The pictures should not incorporate much detail and should have only one subject (eg a baby’s bottle or a rattle).

It is important to hold a baby on your lap while you page through a book together, as this will satisfy his or her strong need for physical contact.

### **Make your own book!**

The best “first book” must surely be a book that you can make yourself. I will describe four easy, interesting methods of making a first book, but do use your own imagination as well, and try and think up your own variations.

- Take any strong cardboard (more suitable than paper because it will not tear as easily), and make a little book of no more than four pages. Paste a picture of the baby’s mother on the first page — no other “subject” is more familiar in a baby’s life! Now page through magazines for large, clear pictures of objects like a baby’s bottle, a ball and a dummy. Paste each picture on a separate page. To make your book more durable, you could cover each page with transparent, self-adhesive plastic.
- Look for, or make, a sturdy cardboard box that is about 15 to 20 cm square. Paste a picture on each of its six sides. Once again, choose pictures of subjects that are familiar to the baby. This cube-shaped book is an interesting novelty which babies find very engrossing.
- Into a flip file (with plastic files) insert bright pictures from a catalogue of baby clothes and toys, as well as any other objects familiar to a baby. Slide these pictures into the files. This is a very sturdy and practical “book” — practical, because you can change the pictures to suite new interests.
- Another possibility is to use a flip-type photograph album with little plastic pockets. Search for suitable pictures from magazines and catalogues and slide them into the plastic pockets. These are easy to manage and very sturdy.

## **5.2.1 Stories and books suitable for children aged one to three years**

When you choose stories and books for this age group, keep the following in mind:

- One of the most obvious characteristics of these children is their rapid language development. Their vocabulary expands quickly, and the sentences they put together become more correct and complete.
- They are enormously interested in everything that happens around them.
- They enjoy repetition.
- They like bright, cheerful colours and pictures.

- They are beginning to take an interest in people, things and animals that are not part of their immediate daily lives.
- They are becoming more skilful; they have more muscular control and even though they are still quite clumsy, they can pick up things with their fingers.

The following specific points therefore have a bearing on book selection for this age group:

- Picture books from their baby years are still favourites — use the home-made ideas and change the pictures to suite new interests.
- Picture books can now deal with themes that are outside the child's immediate environment. Themes like "animal mothers and their little ones", farm animals and pets are favourites.
- Pictures should have bright, cheerful colours, and can now include a certain amount of detail.
- From about two years onwards, children are able to enjoy simple story books.
- These children will enjoy simple stories that include a lot of repetition. They also like hearing the same story over and over again, and will repeatedly look at the same picture.
- Children of this age group want to look at a book themselves. Make sure their books have strong pages, and give them the opportunity to page through their books on their own.

### 5.2.2 Stories and books suitable for children aged three to four

Children in this age group form the junior group in the ECD centre. Take the following into account when you choose stories and books for this age group:

- The three-year-old is still very egocentric (self-centred), and is interested only in what concerns her directly.
- They are still interested in events and people that are part of their familiar environment — but not necessarily their immediate, direct environment.
- Three-year-olds still think in concrete terms, and understand everything in a literal (concrete) way.
- They are not yet able to distinguish between reality and fantasy — for them, everything is possible.
- They enjoy repetition.
- It is important to them to feel safe.
- They are very active, and still find it difficult to sit still for longer than ten minutes.
- Their concentration span is short, and their attention quickly wanders.

**Specific points to look for in stories and books for this age group are the following:**

- Stories and books should deal with people, animals and things with which three-year-olds can identify. This means they need to feel that what happens in the story could also happen to them. The typical events that take place in their environment provide suitable themes.
- Three-year-olds enjoy stories and books that are realistic, books which deal with things that **can** happen. They are still discovering the world around them, and this reality is quite wonderful enough for them!
- They find stories that have a lot of repetition immensely enjoyable, and they still enjoy looking at the same book over and over again.
- Make sure the story is short, otherwise they will get bored.

You could also make up your own stories, such as *A birthday*, which you can plan with reference to everyday events.

### 5.2.3 Stories and books suitable for children aged four to five years

Children in this age group form the middle group in the ECD centre. Remember the following characteristics of these children when choosing stories and books for them:

- The interests of children aged four to five have broadened to include more than themselves and their immediate environment. They are starting to take an interest in what other people do, and although they are still egocentric, they are beginning to take other people into account as well.
- These children are not yet able to distinguish between fantasy and reality.
- Four-year-olds enjoy comical language, word games and words that represent sound.
- They enjoy obvious, sometimes silly jokes, and often behave in a rather silly way themselves.
- They love exaggeration even when telling stories themselves.
- They have an insatiable curiosity about things, and the never-ending “Why?” of the four-to-five-year-old is probably the most noticeable characteristic of this group.
- Children of this age can now sit quietly and can concentrate for longer.

**Specific points to look for in stories and books for this age group are as follows:**

“A good picture book which interests a three-year-old child also interests a four-year-old child, but for a shorter period.”

- These children are beginning to enjoy stories about the “unknown”. Themes outside their immediate environment are now perfectly appropriate.
- They enjoy and understand stories about events that **could** happen, however improbable (like the behaviour of the monkeys in E Slobodikina’s *Caps for sale*).
- Stories which are funny, silly and full of exaggeration are especially suitable.
- They enjoy stories and books about what people, animals and objects do, and how they grow, especially if they answer the question “Why?”
- Four-to-five-year-olds can look at a book for a longer period of time, and can listen attentively for longer.
- The favourite stories of the three-to-four-year-old are therefore also suitable for this age group — but not for long.

### 5.2.4 Stories and books suitable for children aged five to six

Children in this age group form the senior group or reception class in an ECD centre or primary school. Keep the following in mind when choosing stories and books for this age group:

- Very characteristic of this age is the broadening of children’s understanding of the world around them.
- Five-to-six-year-olds are now able to distinguish between fantasy and reality.
- They are very inquisitive and eager to learn.
- They enjoy new discoveries and adventures.
- Six-year-olds are no longer so egocentric, and already have a more objective view of themselves and the world around them.

- Six-year-olds begin to take an interest in numbers, words and letters.
- Six-year-olds with lots of exposure to books are keen and ready to be introduced to reading activities.

With these characteristics as a background, you should look for the following when choosing stories and books for this age group:

- Five-to-six-year-olds enjoy fantasies with wonderful characters and events as well as the unexpected and the astonishing.
- They like stories and books that convey information in a straightforward way.
- Simple adventure stories and books are suitable.
- Suitable themes deal with the less familiar, such as children from other countries.
- The senior group also enjoys humour, exaggeration and word play.
- They are starting to enjoy stories and books that are simply written, with clear, explanatory illustrations, which they can “read” themselves.

### 5.2.5 Characteristics of children aged seven to eight

Children in this age group form the Foundation Phase in the primary school. Keep the following in mind when choosing stories and books for this age group:

- One of the most important differences between preschoolers and those in the first school year is surely that the children starting school learn to read and gradually improve their mastery of this skill.
- By the time a child starts school, he or she has a good grasp of the difference between fantasy and reality — of what can really happen.
- These children are increasingly able to understand figurative (abstract) language.
- This phase is the start of logical thinking.
- Children beginning school have an increasingly responsible realisation of right and wrong, and they **begin** to express their own judgement of right and wrong.
- Friends become extremely important and have an enormous influence on what a child wishes to do.
- Children in this age group develop an interest in hobbies — particularly in things they themselves can make or do.

### 5.2.6 Stories and books suitable for children aged seven to eight

Stories and books suitable for children aged seven to eight include the following:

- Stories and books with a simple text that children can read for themselves are well suited to this age group. It is not always easy to find good, interesting stories and books that are also easy to read. “Easy-reading” stories and books are often more suited to younger children and, for this reason, those in Grade 1 may find them boring.
- Children enjoy fantasy tales, particularly those that are exaggeratedly “marvellous” like *Charlie and the chocolate factory* by Roald Dahl.
- While stories and books featuring descriptive language are also enjoyable, their stories and books must nevertheless contain plenty of action.
- Children enjoy stories and books that teach them how to make things, such as children’s cookery books and books containing simple experiments.



- Humorous stories and books — especially when the humour is exaggerated or even absurd — retain their popularity.
- Children in the upper range of this age group (nine years and upwards) enjoy stories and books featuring gangs and adventure immensely.

Obviously, the general criteria for good children's literature also apply to the choice of stories and books for the various age groups. When evaluating a children's story for a particular group, a teacher might ask the following questions:

- Is the story within the sphere of interest of the children in my group?
- Is it at their level of comprehension — not too abstract or too unusual?
- Do the language usage, vocabulary and concepts match my group's competence?
- Are the theme and underlying message suitable for my group?
- Is the story the right length? (For children under seven the story should be just long enough to complete in one reading — no serials! Older children enjoy a more complex and longer story that may extend over a few readings.)
- Does the story meet **all** the criteria for a good children's story?

### *5.3 The teacher's role in presenting literature to young children*

#### 5.3.1 The young child's experiences of literature

Literature (stories, poems and rhymes) is one of the most important means at the teacher's disposal for improving the young child's language and thinking, thus enhancing the young child's total development.

The ECD teacher's main role in teaching literature is to help the child to **discover** good children's literature. Young children's literary experience is based mainly on the following:

- picture books which they can handle themselves, and in which the text is secondary to the illustrations
- listening to books read or stories told by teacher/adults, where they, the children, are involved either individually or as members of a large or small group
- retelling stories to friends or an adult
- dramatisations of stories
- listening to rhymes and poetry
- reciting rhymes and poetry
- reading books on their own

#### 5.3.2 The teacher's attitude

The teacher's own attitude towards books is a key factor. Books should be treated with respect, and should be presented to the young child with appreciation. They should never be treated as toys. Young children have to learn that a book is something special and valuable, and that they should respect it.

A child's attitude towards reading and literature in general will play a decisive role in how he or she relates to books in later life, so it is essential for teachers to ensure that young children's encounters with literature are always pleasurable. Story time should have

satisfying, restful and pleasant associations for them. If this is achieved, it will lay the foundation for a love of reading and good literature.

### 5.3.3 The teacher's knowledge

The young child depends on the teacher's help to discover books.

Teachers need to know:

- the level of development of the group they are teaching so that the literature they choose will fit in with the group's interests, comprehension and language skills
- the characteristics of good literature for young children so that they are able to evaluate and distinguish between the literature that has literary value and the stories and rhymes that have little more to offer the young child than a way of passing time

### 5.3.4 A book area

In order to expose the children to an environment "rich in words and books", a teacher should see to it that there is a "book area" in the playroom. To be able to plan a pleasant and inviting book area you should keep the following guidelines in mind:

- The book area should be in a quiet part of the playroom (not next to the art area).
- The book area should be an attractive area that will invite the children to page through books.
- The floor covering should be comfortable and inviting. (Ideally the floor would be covered by a carpet or colourful cushions on which the children can sit while they page through the books.)
- The books should not be piled in a heap, but displayed on a shelf. An inexpensive way of displaying books is to suspend a rope from one wall to another and to hang the books over the stretched rope.
- The shelves or rope should be low enough to enable the children to see what books are available and handle them by themselves.
- The area need not be very big as the children will be sitting still and do not need to move around.
- Provide seating for about five children.
- If possible, the book area should be screened off from the rest of the group. A low shelf or a screen may be used (even if this is made of cardboard).
- There need not be many books at a time. About ten suitable books would be sufficient for a week or two.
- The books should also be very carefully selected to suit the interests and developmental level of the group concerned, and should meet all the requirements of good literature.
- Make sure that the books, even if they are on the same theme, reflect variety and diversity. (Example: instead of displaying books about the traditional families only, you should feature nontraditional families too.)

## 5.4 *Self-evaluation questions*

### Long questions on Study unit 5

- (1) Name ten elements that are unacceptable in children's stories, and explain briefly why each is unacceptable.

- (2) Discuss the criteria for the selection of stories in terms of the following:
  - (a) the child's requirements
  - (b) literary and aesthetic requirements
  - (c) illustrations
  - (d) technicalities and technical requirements
- (3) Discuss the following statement: "The literary standards according to which children's poetry and rhymes are evaluated are not inferior to those used to evaluate adult poetry."
- (4) Discuss books and stories suitable for the following:
  - (a) babies
  - (b) children aged one to three years
  - (c) children aged three to four years
  - (d) children aged four to five years
  - (e) children in the reception-year class
  - (f) children in the Foundation Phase in primary school
- (5) There are children whose first contact with books, especially story books, is when they come to school. How would you help these children to develop a caring and positive attitude towards books?
- (6) Why do you think a teacher needs to know about the level of development of the group he or she is teaching and about the characteristics of good literature for young children?

### **Short questions on Study unit 5**

- (1) Name the two most important aspects to keep in mind when choosing good literature suitable for young children.
- (2) Name six characteristics and needs that should be taken into account when choosing literature for young children.
- (3) When would a story have sufficient opportunity for identification by the child?
- (4) Why should the emotional tone of a children's story not be overstated?
- (5) Why should a children's story have a happy ending?
- (6) Name the most important characteristic of a story theme that would be suited to three-year-olds.
- (7) Is a chronological story structure suitable for young children? Explain your answer very briefly.
- (8) What type of story structure is especially suitable for children under the age of three?
- (9) Explain in your own words the phrase "classic story structure".
- (10) Why is it so important to include illustrations in a children's book?
- (11) For what type of children's stories are folkloristic illustrations especially suitable?
- (12) Name two examples of how the typeface can add to the general atmosphere of a children's story.
- (13) Give one characteristic of verses and rhymes suitable for the junior group.
- (14) Why should stories and books for the junior group be realistic?
- (15) What type (or types) of children's story is (are) suitable for the age group five to six years?
- (16) Name five characteristics of stories and books for children between the ages of seven and nine.

- (17) Name four aspects of a child's language development in the early childhood development phase that can be improved by telling or reading stories.
- (18) Explain briefly how reading a children's story can expand a child's vocabulary.
- (19) List four activities that could arise from children's stories, which would improve a child's creative language.
- (20) Name five aspects of a child's intellectual development that can be promoted by reading or telling stories.
- (21) Name three ways in which reading or telling stories can improve a child's concept formation.

## *Study unit 6*

# *Presenting children's stories in the early childhood development phase*

### **Outcomes**

After completing this study unit, you should be able to

- critically discuss the various methods of presenting literature to the young child
- have the necessary skills to apply the different methods of presenting literature to young children

## *6.1 Introduction*

In the daily programme of a centre for early childhood development and the timetable of the children in the Foundation Phase, one of the most enjoyable moments for both teacher and children is story time. To a large extent, the pleasure young children get from story time depends on how the teacher presents it. Presentation can be successful only if the story has been well prepared, and is supported by the use of appropriate media. The chief methods used to put across children's stories are the following:

- reading stories aloud with or without the use of suitable media
- reading stories aloud with a book as the medium
- puppet shows presented by the teacher
- audiovisual presentations of stories using videos, slide programmes or records/CDs/sound cassettes
- independent reading of easy story books by children in the Foundation Phase

The most important method of presenting children's stories to children under the age of five is the **telling** of stories. The reasons for this are the following:

- When a teacher **reads** a story, eye contact with the children is broken, and this makes it impossible to create the intimate atmosphere very young children need.
- It is very important for teachers to be able to observe every child while they are telling them the story. This enables a teacher to determine whether the children are still interested or whether they are becoming overanxious.

- Telling of stories also gives a teacher more freedom to change or end a story should the children become restless or bored.

## *6.2 Guidelines for story telling*

Successful story telling is an art, but it is one that every teacher can learn. It does require a bit practice but, if you adopt the following principles and guidelines, you can become a skilful story teller.

### 6.2.1 Preparation

Thorough preparation is a prerequisite for successful story telling. When preparing a story, you should keep the following in mind:

We should make sure that we know the story very well, and begin by trying to get an image of the story in our minds. It is a good idea to read it through slowly, close the book and think it through. Read it again, and then establish a clear idea of the main thought and overall mood of the story. We should get to know the characters and the sequence of events, and visualise the setting, the characters and the events.

There is no need to memorise the story, because then you will not be able to tell it in a natural, spontaneous way. You could, however, memorise a repeated refrain.

You will need to make or collect appropriate media, and you should ensure that they are well integrated with the story. Illustrations should be numbered and properly prepared for presentation beforehand. Keep these in the correct sequence — in a suitable container such as a box or an envelope — so that they are readily available. If you have to search for a picture, or if it refuses to stick to the flannel board, the children's concentration will be broken and the atmosphere destroyed.



#### **REMEMBER:**

Thorough preparation adds to one's self-confidence.

### 6.2.2 Presentation

Keep the following in mind when telling a story:

Sit on a low stool, or on the floor.

Let the children sit around you in a half-circle. Make eye contact with them, and include each one in the group.

Plan a good beginning to get the children's attention. Use an attention-catching technique such as singing the same song before every story telling.

Avoid unnecessary descriptions and explanations while telling the story.

Use direct speech when a character says something.

Remember that the voice is the instrument with which the art of story telling is performed.

The ideal voice is audible, and pleasant to listen to. It is the teller's voice that gives life to the story. The quality of the voice needs to be varied to match the characters. Use an ordinary speaking voice — speak clearly, and not too quickly. Make effective use of the tempo of your narration. When the action speeds up, the tempo could increase as well. A short pause can be very effective just before a question, a surprise or a moment of tension. Tell the more important sections slowly, and give the children a chance to absorb the idea following an important phrase.

Always remember that the story should be “told”, not “performed”. The children should remember the story, not the teller. A good story teller will not draw the attention to herself. While lively gestures and facial expressions are the hallmarks of a skilful story teller, take care, nevertheless, not to exaggerate your gestures. You should do nothing that is not natural. A relaxed story teller allows the children relax as well.

The length of the story should match the attention span of the group. One should not carry on for too long, but keep observing the group to see whether they are losing interest in the story.

Do not ask unnecessary questions because this can distract the children's attention. Story telling is not a comprehension test!

Illustrations are usually shown to the group while the story is being told. However, there is no general agreement on this point and pictures may be shown to the children before or after the telling of the story as well. Your choice will depend on the type of story you are telling.

Young children will make spontaneous comments while they listen to a story because they identify with the characters. A teacher should make sure that these do not completely disrupt the course of the story, but not at the expense of the children's spontaneity.

Some children find it difficult to listen to a story and, when this happens, teachers could ask themselves the following questions:

- Why is this child's attention wandering?
- Is the story too difficult?
- Can the child hear well enough?
- Has the child heard only a few stories previously?
- Are there elements in the story that are upsetting the child?

If there are no obvious reasons for a child's restlessness during story time, a teacher needs to take steps to overcome this for the sake of the rest of the group, such as:

- letting the child sit next to her
- using his or her name as the name of the main character
- making it clear in a friendly way to a child who is always asking questions or passing comments that disrupt the telling of the story, that all questions and comments will be attended to once the story has been told
- asking a child who persists in disturbing the others, to leave the group, and to go and sit on his own (in the same room)

Do remember, however, that very young children are still learning how to listen and function in a group, so be sympathetic and patient.

Enthusiasm and friendliness during presentation are vital.

## 6.3 *The value of media in telling a story*

It is important to select interesting, effective media, not just because they will enhance your story telling, but also because being exposed to effective media is very valuable in the young child's development.

### 6.3.1 Visual literacy

The use of the right kinds of media can improve a young child's visual literacy. Visual literacy refers to the ability to correctly interpret visual stimuli in the environment. Nowadays, both children and adults are exposed to an enormous amount of visual information, all of which has to be correctly interpreted. Just one example of visual information which a young child must be able to interpret is a red traffic light, which he or she has to interpret as meaning STOP.

Pictures help young children to pay attention to visual information and to interpret it. Pictures "tell" a story and, by using them, one can guide a child to interpret visual information correctly.

### 6.3.2 Improving visual perception

A young child's visual skills can be improved through the use of good media in the following ways:

Visual skills such as discriminating and distinguishing between foreground and background are improved.

The child acquires the skill of depth perception. Depth perception is the ability to correctly interpret depth in a picture: a house in the background is further away and is therefore smaller than a house in the foreground. This is an important skill in the child's everyday life, especially to a child as a road user. The correct interpretation of far and near (depth) is of cardinal importance for safe pedestrian behaviour.

### 6.3.3 Concept formation

Exposure to good media helps young children to achieve a better understanding of new concepts. This is especially true of stories containing relatively more abstract, complex concepts.

The use of media with religious stories can help children to form a better understanding of the concept of time, as in expressions like "It happened a long, long time ago".

When a story contains many unfamiliar concepts, they can be explained to children with the help of visual media.

Because pictures are a representation of reality (or sometimes, in a children's story, of a fantasy world), they provide a bridge between the real, concrete representation of something (object or concept) and its abstract image. Very young children still think in a concrete way, and media can assist their progress towards more abstract thinking.

### 6.3.4 Improving language usage

Interesting media can stimulate young children's creative language usage. For example, one could let them discuss interesting aspects of an illustration.



Young children can also use media like flash cards, hand puppets and flannel board pictures to retell a story to their playmates. These media are discussed in greater detail later in this study unit.

### 6.3.5 Emergent reading

Good media can advance the reading readiness of the child for the following reasons:

The use of good media encourages children to notice and interpret visual detail, which is crucial to a good understanding of how events follow one another. This, in turn, is essential to reading and spelling. A child needs to be able to make fine discriminations and to interpret a series of symbols in order to read and spell.

Illustrations depicting a course of events provide an important introduction to the whole process of recognising and interpreting differences, and of arranging events in a sequence.

### 6.3.6 Appreciation of the visual arts

Young children are aware of form and colour before they become aware of line, composition, perspective, structure and space. By using well-planned media, an ECD teacher can guide young children towards experiencing these elements of art as well, and this lays the foundation for appreciating and understanding the visual arts. Young children's aesthetic development is promoted by the quality and variety of the media with which they come into contact.

If children are offered visual media during their preschool and school years, their growing awareness becomes a knowledge base for judgement of excellence and for their own preferences in life. It is continuous stimulation by the excellent and beautiful that develops discriminating taste in illustration and enriched personal meaning (Burke 1986:142).

## 6.4 *General characteristics of good media*

There are numerous media that can be used to illustrate stories and, in fact, we recommend that a large variety should be used during the course of a year. The use of media stimulates children's interest and imagination, retains their attention and encourages creativity. All the different media that we shall be discussing should meet the following requirements:

- The media and the story should form a complete unit. Instead of merely repeating one another, they should complement one another. The action in the story should be reflected in the illustration.
- The media should not contradict the story or previous illustrations in the story. If, for example, a red jersey is mentioned in the story, the character in the illustration should **wear** a red jersey.
- The visual perspective used in the media should be correct. The relationships between objects should be as realistic as possible.
- In realistic stories, media should be realistic, correct and true to nature. Be careful, however, of too much detail in illustrations.

## 6.5 *Specific criteria for the different types of media*

### 6.5.1 Flannelboard illustrations

The flannelboard consists of a piece of cardboard covered with flannel. Felt is actually better because it is more durable, and illustrations stick to it more easily. A dark colour, such as black, dark blue or bottle green, may be used to contrast with illustrations. The board is placed on a stand, or against a wall or a chair. On the back of each illustration (which also has a number) there is a small square of sandpaper, foam rubber or felt, which helps the picture to stick to the board.

#### 6.5.1.1 Requirements for flannelboard illustrations

The illustrations, which should be large and simple, may be made of strong paper, vylene or felt.

They should be colourful, but without too much detail.

They should be neatly coloured in or painted, and should reflect the atmosphere of the story.

Do not use too many small pictures. Illustrate just the most important events and characters. If the story requires a lot of pictures, is not suitable for flannelboard presentation.

Cut out the pictures **on** the outline, because this gives a neater display.

Keep relative sizes and relationships in mind. Although exact scale drawings are not possible to produce, it must be clear that, for example, a cow is larger than a cat.

Plan the position of the illustrations beforehand — figures cut in half (horizontally) should be lined up with the lower edge of the flannelboard, and not placed in the middle of the flannelboard.

Make sure that the illustrations of a given character are placed on the flannelboard one at a time. Remove the previous illustration of the character from the board **before** placing a new one.

#### 6.5.1.2 Suitable stories

- The very hungry caterpillar (Eric Carle)
- *Caps for sale* (E Slobodikina)
- *How do I put it on?* (Shigeo Watanabe)
- *The enormous turnip* (Traditional — Ladybird Books)

### 6.5.2 Magnetic board illustrations

A magnetic board is a metal board having one side painted with blackboard paint for use as a chalkboard, and the other side covered with felt for use as a flannel board. Small magnets are attached to the back of illustrations. Alternatively, the magnets themselves may be placed on the board and the illustrations stuck to them with Prestik. A magnetic board can hold large illustrations and three dimensional objects more effectively than a flannel board.

#### 6.5.2.1 Requirements for magnetic board illustrations

The illustrations should meet requirements similar to those for a flannel board.

### 6.5.2.2 Suitable stories

The following are examples of stories suitable for telling while using a magnetic board:

- *The tool box* (Anne Rockwell)
- *The king who learned to smile* (Reit Seymore)

### 6.5.3 Chalkboard illustrations

Most playrooms or classrooms have a chalkboard which can be used to illustrate stories by means of simple line drawings.

#### 6.5.3.1 Requirements for chalkboard illustrations

The illustrations should also meet requirements similar to those for flannelboard illustrations.

### 6.5.4 Flash-card illustrations

Flash-card illustrations are done on large pieces of cardboard. One can also use material, tissue paper, string, wallpaper, or anything that will give the illustrations a three-dimensional effect. The children can look at and touch the pictures after the story has been told.

You can do some unusual things with flash cards, such as the following:

- Make parts of the illustrations in such a way that they can be raised.
- Bind the flash cards together to make a flip chart.
- Fold the flash cards together to make a concertina book.

#### 6.5.4.1 Requirements for flash-card illustrations

The following are requirements for flash-card illustrations:

Keep the illustrations very bright and clear.

Flash cards are especially suitable for use with realistic stories, where the illustrations can incorporate more detail.

### 6.5.5 Three-dimensional illustrations

These illustrations are provided with a small cardboard stand or wheels. You could also make them of styrofoam, or a similar material, and then place them on a flat surface or a table. Hide the illustrations beforehand — this stimulates the children's interest.

#### 6.5.5.1 Requirements for three-dimensional illustrations

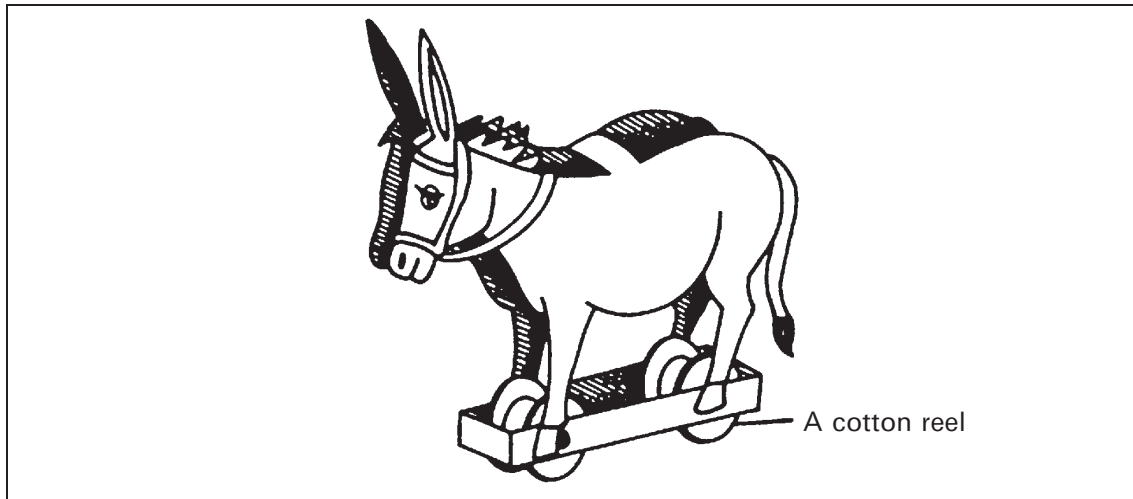
Take particular care with the finishing off illustrations of this type, since they can easily look untidy.

As with flannelboard illustrations, pay attention to the relative sizes of the different figures and objects.

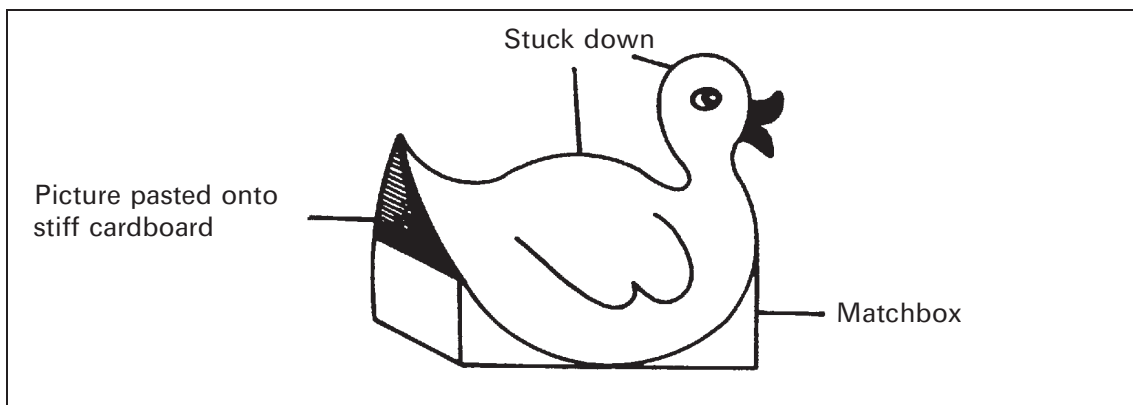
FIGURE 6.1

*Examples of three-dimensional illustrations*

A movable three-dimensional illustration



A donkey that moves



A static three-dimensional illustration

**6.5.6 TV roll illustrations**

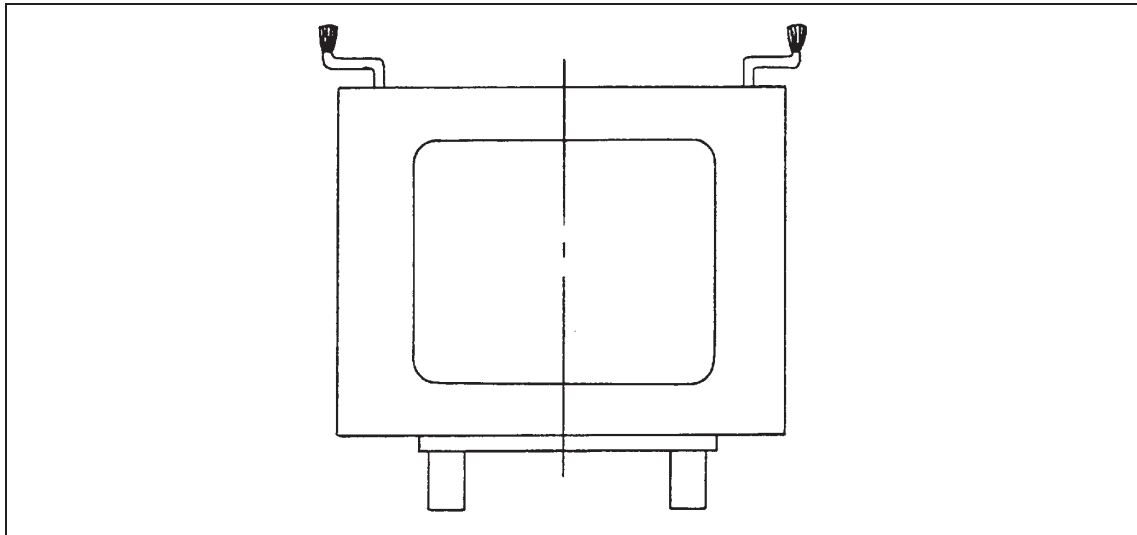
This is a box with two rollers onto which a roll of continuous illustrations is fitted. The roll with continuous illustration is rolled onto a roller, and then wound over onto the other roller with a crank handle while the story is being told.

This technique can also be used with the older groups in early childhood education (children between the ages of six and nine). Each of the children in the group makes a certain illustration of a story they have heard. In this way the whole story is illustrated. The different pictures are then pasted onto a long piece of paper and wound around the rollers in the TV box for display.

**REMEMBER:**

This medium is only suitable for stories where the teacher or children draw illustrations in a continuous manner and it requires several pictures.

### 6.5.6.1 Requirements for TV roll illustrations



When making a TV roll illustration, you should do the following:

- Draw the illustrations on vylene, which is more durable than paper.
- Use a piece of vylene or paper that is long enough to depict the whole story.
- The illustrations must appear in continuous succession, so do not place individual pictures in boxes or outlines of any kind.
- Place the completed roll of illustrations between pieces of clean newsprint and iron the roll, to make the whole apparatus more permanent.

### 6.5.7 Using everyday objects as media

It is possible to tell stories using everyday objects as media. This type of medium is **very** difficult to use. Because we have to illustrate **all** main *characters* and main *events*, it is very difficult to find suitable real-life objects. A single object such as a hat to illustrate a story about *Caps for sale* (Slobodikina 1959) or a fish in a fish bowl to illustrate *A fish is a fish* (Lionni 1979) is not a suitable medium. (In both examples only a part of the story is illustrated.)

After the children have heard a story, real-life objects may be used as enrichment to fit in with a specific theme. It is better to use real objects **after** a story has been told with suitable pictures, for example:

- clothes to help with the dramatisation of a story
- objects on the science table to reinforce concepts in a realistic story in a concrete way

## 6.6 *Reading as a method of presenting stories*

The reading of story books is very important to the child, especially from the age of about five. The importance arises from the fact that children need to see the written word and hear it spoken. The two are associated with each other, and this is an important element of reading readiness.

### 6.6.1 When should we read stories aloud?

When a child is comfortably able to listen to a story being told, he or she will be ready to listen to the teacher reading stories from a book. From the age of about five, children are able to concentrate sufficiently to listen to a “reading story”.

### 6.6.2 Guidelines for reading stories aloud

The correct way of reading a book aloud is for the teacher to read through the book beforehand to ensure that he or she knows the story.

One should then read the book to the group in a normal conversational tone.

There should be opportunities for interruptions and questions while the book is being read. A child of five finds it almost impossible to listen to a story without interpolating questions.

Teachers should encourage children to recount the story to them or the others in the group, using the pictures. This should never be forced, however, since story time should always be relaxed and pleasant.

### 6.6.3 Independent reading of stories and books

#### 6.6.3.1 Guidelines for independent reading by children in the Reception Year

Some children may start reading books “independently” at a very young age, and it often happens that a child who has a rich experience of books and who may have heard a story many times will be able to “read” a story even before starting school.

One should encourage one’s group to “read” a story in a book — with the aid of the pictures. Even though this may be little more than retelling the story and simply imitating actual reading, it is an important preparatory reading activity.

#### 6.6.3.2 Beginner readers in the Foundation Phase

Children in the Foundation Phase (Grade 1) begin with formal reading instruction. It is vital to reinforce this skill by providing the class with suitable children’s literature which they can read independently.

How can teachers encourage independent reading?

A recurring problem with beginners’ reading books is that they tend to be boring. For this reason they do not entice children to want to read more. An attractive but easy-to-read story book can compensate for this.

When your class begins to read, you could stimulate their desire to read by placing easy story books — within their reading level — in the book area of the class. Suitable story books would have few printed words but plenty of explanatory pictures.

Start by reading the books aloud to your group so that they will know the story.

During “silent reading periods” one could assist individual children with their reading of the books. If, while a child is endeavouring to read the book on her own, she is unable to read a word, or perhaps reads something incorrectly, you could show her how to read it correctly. Emphasis should, however, be placed on understanding the story rather than reading the words “correctly”.

In due course one could read a page from a book, thus stimulating a child's interest in the book so that he will later wish to read the book himself. Always remember to focus on **understanding** rather than **reading correctly**.

### 6.6.3.3 Accomplished readers in the Foundation Phase

By the middle of the second year of their schooling, children ought to enjoy reading simple books in their home language. As teachers, our task at this stage is to help our classes to find good books that they can read on their own — regularly! We should take an interest in what they are reading, and talk to them about the books they are reading. In this way we shall be cultivating a critical approach to reading in these children, and nurturing children who will read with understanding and love.

## 6.7 *Using puppets as a method of presenting stories*

A very exciting and challenging way of presenting stories is through puppet shows. Puppet shows are often used in educational programmes (even on TV) to convey important information to children. When we use puppets as a method of presenting literature (stories) we should keep the outcomes of children's literature in mind. The most important learning outcome is **not** knowledge or information, but a love for literature. This is why puppet shows (such as "Why it is important to brush your teeth?" or "Healthy food") whose main purpose is to teach children something are **not** considered part of children's literature. Although the basic principles of puppet shows apply to the more informative shows as well as to puppet shows that illustrate good literature are the same, the content is completely different.

### 6.7.1 Guidelines for puppet shows

All the requirements for good children's stories apply to puppet shows.

The puppet show must be fun and the story line must contain lots of humour.

The story must not have more than four characters (it is difficult to change your voice into more than four distinctively different sounding voices).

At any time only two characters should appear together on the puppet stage (you have only two hands to hold the puppets).

Involve the children. Let them enter into conversation with the characters. Young children enjoy it enormously if they are cleverer than one of the characters.

Exaggerated humour and events are particularly appropriate for a puppet show.

Use simple hand puppets in preference to marionettes. Stick puppets can also be very successfully used to portray additional characters.

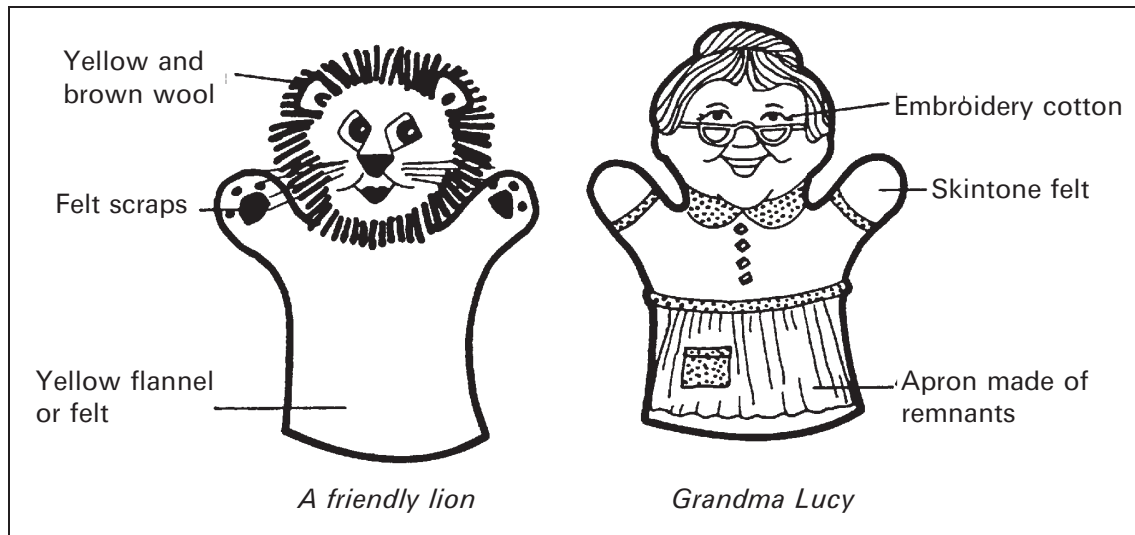


#### **REMEMBER:**

Puppet shows presented to children under the age of five require thorough planning. Children in this age group are spontaneous and free about expressing their thoughts, emotions and interpretations. They can sometimes become confused by puppet shows because they do not understand the meaning of the imaginary world created by the puppets. If the reality portrayed by the puppets becomes too dangerous or frightening, they feel insecure and afraid.

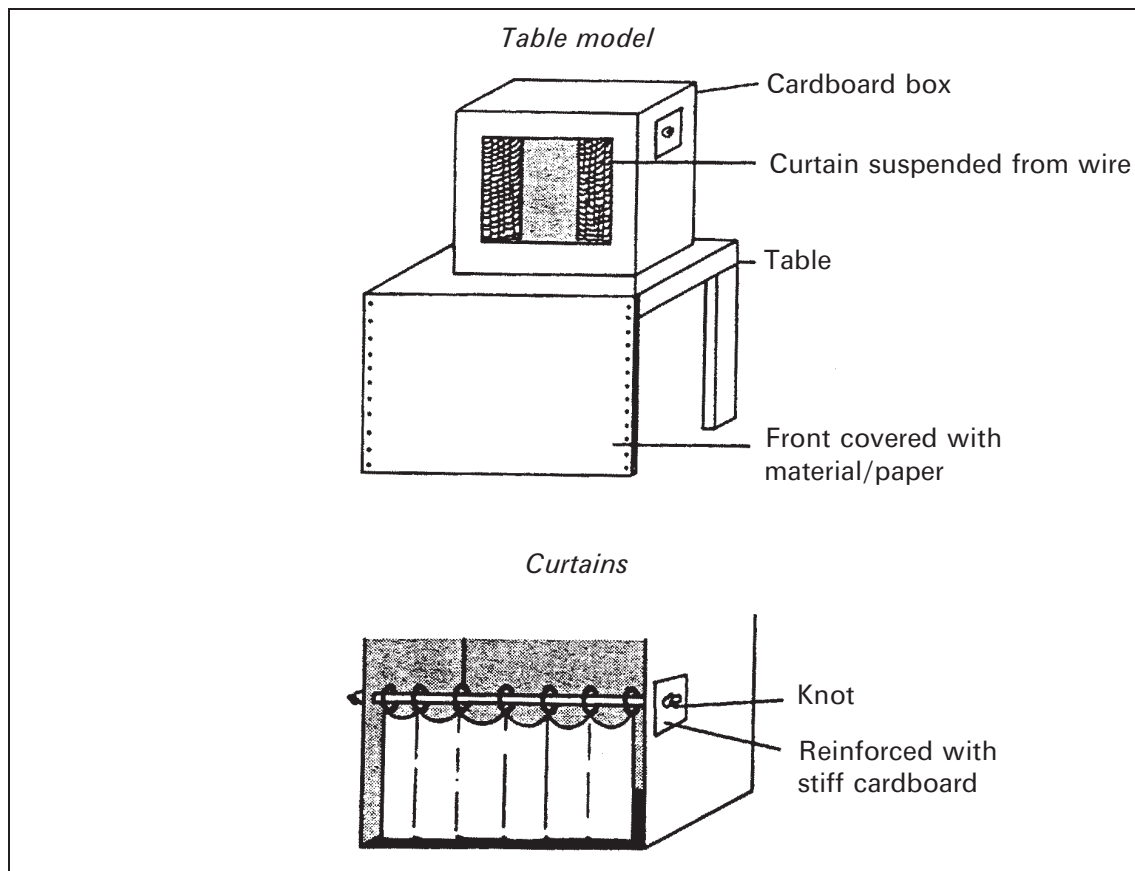


FIGURE 6.2

*Example of a hand puppet*

Source: Grobler, Faber, et al (1996:127)

FIGURE 6.3

*Example of an easy and inexpensive puppet theatre*

Source: Grobler, Faber, et al (1996:125)

A puppet show probably requires more preparation than any other method of presenting children's stories. However, it is also one that most children enjoy. Teachers are advised to try and prepare at least one good puppet show a month.

## *6.8 Audiovisual presentation*

### 6.8.1 Stories recorded on CDs and tape cassettes

CDs and tape recordings of stories can be very useful if they contain good stories that are well told. Their value lies in the fact that children are obliged to form their own visual images of the events in the story.

The disadvantage of CDs and cassettes, however, is that the intimate atmosphere created by the teacher telling (and even reading) a story is lacking. It is more difficult for the young child to listen attentively to records, CDs and cassettes. This type of story medium is most suitable when used with small groups of listeners, such as children who are waiting to be picked up to go home.

### 6.8.2 Television

Television is a wonderful medium for bringing the distant world into the playroom or classroom. This makes it a very effective medium for the older child in the ECD because it enables the children to **see** and **hear** about the world around them.

All the same, television does not provide opportunities for intimate, personal communication between viewer and teller/announcer. This is very important for successful learning by the very young child. Furthermore, television gives the child no opportunity to make his or her own visual interpretations, because the images are very complete. These "very complete" images leave very little to children's imagination and can hamper their visual creativity.

One of the aims of story time is to nurture a love of books and reading in the young child, and a further disadvantage of television is precisely that it makes people read less. Accordingly, television is a medium that is not used during story time.

Television can however be used with great success during periods such as environmental studies where suitable video programmes can illustrate what the child hears from the teacher.

### 6.8.3 Films and slides

These media have the same disadvantages as television: they are impersonal, and the visual images are very complete. A further negative attribute is that the playroom has to be darkened during a film or slide show, and very young children may find this very threatening. (They may even start crying.) Working in darkness also means that the teacher cannot observe the children in order to deal with any moments of uncertainty or anxiety. When showing a film or slides, the teacher handles the equipment, and usually stands behind the children, which means that there is little likelihood that he or she will be able to create the intimate eye contact that is so important in presenting stories. If a soundtrack is used with the film or slide show, the situation becomes even more impersonal.

Once again, media such as a film or a series of slides (preferably without any soundtrack) can be useful if the aim is to provide additional information about a theme. But these presentations should never replace the presentation of children's stories.

## 6.9 Self-evaluation questions

### Long questions (test your insight) on Study unit 6

- (1) Briefly discuss the most important principles of preparing and telling a story. Discuss how you would handle a restless child during story telling.
- (2) The story teller's voice is an important instrument for making story time enjoyable for the child. Discuss **why** and **how** the story teller's voice may be used to enhance a story.
- (3) Media are very important when presenting children's stories. List, in point style, the criteria for good media.
- (4) Name and briefly discuss five different types of media that are suitable for story presentations in early childhood teaching. Where possible, use practical examples to explain your discussion.
- (5) What medium or media do you regard as the best and most appropriate medium or media for telling a story to a group of children in an ECD centre? Substantiate your answer.
- (6) Critically discuss the following methods of presenting children's stories:
  - (a) reading a story to children under the age of five
  - (b) audiovisual presentations
  - (c) puppet shows
- (7) Discuss "independent reading" of stories as a method of enhancing the love of reading and literature in the Foundation Phase. Pay special attention to the role of the teacher.

### Short questions on Study unit 6

- (1) Name the most important methods of presenting children's stories.
- (2) What is the most important method of presenting children's stories to children under the age of five?
- (3) Why should a story not be memorised, word for word?
- (4) Why should a children's story not be overdramatised?
- (5) Why should unnecessary questions be avoided during the telling of a story?
- (6) Why is it important to vary one's story telling media during the course of the year?
- (7) When, in the course of telling a story, should one show illustrations to a group of young children?
- (8) List four characteristics of illustrations suitable for use with a flannelboard.
- (9) Why is it better to tell very young children a story rather than reading to them?
- (10) What is the most important benefit of reading stories?
- (11) Give three reasons why films and slide shows are not recommended as media for use with story telling.

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